By the Same Author:

THE SLAVE SHIP
CROATAN
ADMIRAL OF THE OCEAN SEA
SILVER CROSS
MICHAEL FORTH
SWEET ROCKET
THE LAIRD OF GLENFERNIE
THE WANDERERS
THE FORTUNES OF GARIN
THE WITCH
HAGAR
LEWIS RAND
CEASE FIRING
THE LONG ROLL
THE GODDESS OF REASON: A DRAMA
AUDREY
BY ORDER OF THE COMPANY
THE OLD DOMINION

SIR MORTIMER

SIR MORTIMER

BY

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CHAPTER I

"BUT if we return not from our adventure," ended Sir Mortimer, "if the sea claims us, and upon his sandy floor, amid his Armida gardens, the silver-singing mermaiden marvel at that wreckage which was once a tall ship and at those bones which once were animate—if strange islands knew our resting-place, sunk for evermore in huge and unkindly forests—if, being but mere pawns in a mighty game, we are lost or changed, happy, however, in that the white hand of our Queen hath touched us, giving thereby consecration to our else unworthiness —if we find no gold, nor take one ship of Spain, nor any city treasure-stored—if we suffer a myriad sort of sorrows and at the last we perish miserably——"

He paused, being upon his feet, a man of about thirty years, richly dressed, and out of reason good to look at. In his hand was a great wine-cup, and he held it high. "I

drink to those who follow after!" he cried. "I drink to those who fail—pebbles cast into water whose ring still wideneth, reaches God knows what unguessable shore where loss may yet be counted gain! I drink to Fortune her minions, to Francis Drake and John Hawkins and Martin Frobisher; to all adventurers and their deeds in the far-off seas! I drink to merry England and to the day when every son shall bring her tribute!—to England, like Aphrodite, new-risen from the main! Drink with me!"

The tavern of the *Triple Tun* rang with acclamation, and, the windows being set wide because of the warmth of the June afternoon, the noise rushed into the street and waylaid the ears of them who went busily to and fro, and of them who lounged in the doorway, or with folded arms played Atlas to the tavern walls. "Who be the roisterers within?" demanded a passing citizen of one of these supporters. The latter made no answer; he was a ragged retainer of Melpomene, and he awaited the coming forth of Sir Mortimer Ferne, a notable encourager of all who would scale Parnassus. But his neighbour, a boy in blue and silver, squatted upon a sunny bench, vouchsafed enlightenment.

"Travellers to strange places," quoth he, taking a straw from his mouth and stretching long arms. "Tall men, swingers in Brazil-beds, parcel-gilt with the Emperor of Manoa, and playfellows to the nymphs of Don Juan Ponce de Leon his fountain—in plain words, my master, Sir Mortimer Ferne, Captain of the *Cygnet*, and his guests to dinner, to wit, Sir John Nevil, Admiral of our fleet, with sundry of us captains and gentlemen adventurers to the Indies, and, for seasoning, a handful of my master's poor friends, such as courtiers and great lords and poets."

"Thinkest to don thy master's wit with his livery?" snapped the poetaster. "'Tis a chain for a man—too heavy for thy wearing."

The boy stretched his arms again. "'Master' no more than in reason," quoth he. "I also am a gentleman. Heigho! The sun shineth hotter here than in the doldrums!"

"Well, go thy ways for a sprightly crack!" said the citizen, preparing to go his. "I know them now, for my cousin Parker had a venture in the *Mere Honour*, and that is the great ship the Queen hath lent Sir John, his other ships being the *Marigold*, the *Cygnet*, and the *Star*, and they're all a-lying above

Greenwich, ready to sail on the morrow for the Spanish Main."

"You've hit it in the clout," yawned the boy. "I'll bring you an emerald hollowed out for a reliquary—if I think on't."

Within-doors, in the *Triple Tun's* best room, where much sherris sack was being drunk, a gentleman with a long face, and mustachios twirled to a point, leaned his arm upon the table and addressed him whose pledge had been so general. "*Armida gardens* and *silver-singing mermaiden* and *Aphrodite England* quotha! *Pike and cutlass and good red gold!* saith the plain man. O Apollo, what a thing it is to be learned and a maker of songs!"

Athwart his laughing words came from the lower end of the board a deep and harsh voice. The speaker was Captain Robert Baldry of the *Star*, and he used the deliberation of one who in his drinking had gone far and fast. "I pledge all scholars turned soldiers," he said, "all courtiers who stay not at court, all poets who win tall ships at the point of a canzonetta! Did Sir Mortimer Ferne make verses—elegies and epitaphs and such toys—at Fayal in the Azores two years ago?"

There followed his speech, heard of all in the room, a moment of amazed silence. Mortimer Ferne put his tankard softly down and turned on his seat so that he might more closely observe his fellow adventurer.

"For myself, when an Armada is at my heels, the cares of the moon do not concern me," went on Baldry, with the gravity of an oracle. "Had Nero not fiddled, perhaps Rome had not burned."

"And where got you that information, sir?" asked his host, in a most courtier-like voice.

"Oh, in the streets of Rome, a thousand years ago! 'Twas common talk." The Captain of the *Star* tilted his cup and was grieved to find it empty.

"I have later news," said the other, as smoothly as before. "At Fayal in the Azores——"

He was interrupted by Sir John Nevil, who had risen from his chair, and beneath whose stare of surprise and anger Baldry, being far from actual drunkenness, moved uneasily.

"I will speak, Mortimer," said the Admiral, "Captain Baldry not being my guest. Sir, at Fayal in the Azores that disastrous

day we did what we could—mortal men can do no more. Taken by surprise as we were, ships were lost and brave men tasted death, but there was no shame. He who held command that lamentable day was Captain—now Sir Mortimer—Ferne; for I, who was Admiral of the expedition, must lie in my cabin, ill almost unto death of a calenture. I dare aver that no wiser head ever drew safety for many from such extremity of peril, and no readier sword ever dearly avenged one day's defeat and loss. Your news, sir, was false. I drink to a gentleman of known discretion, proved courage, unstained honour——"

It needed not the glance of his eye to bring men to their feet. They rose, courtiers and university wits, soldiers home from the Low Countries, kinsmen and country friends, wealthy merchants who had staked their gold in this and other voyages, adventurers who with Frobisher and Gilbert had sailed the icy seas, or with Drake and Hawkins had gazed upon the Southern Cross—Captain Baptist Manwood, of the *Marigold*, Lieutenant Ambrose Wynch, Giles Arden, Anthony Paget, good men and tall, who greatly prized the man who alone kept his seat, smiling

upon them from the head of the long table in the *Triple Tun's* best room. Baldry, muttering in his beard that he had made a throw amiss and that the wine was to blame, stumbled to his feet and stood with the rest. "Sir Mortimer Ferne!" cried they all, and drank to the seated figure. The name was loudly called, and thus it was no slight tide of sound which bore it, that high noon in the year 158—, into the busy London street. Bow Bells were ringing, and to the boy in blue and silver upon the bench without the door they seemed to take the words and sound them again and again, deeply, clearly, above the voices of the city.

Mortimer Ferne, his hand resting upon the table before him, waited until there was quiet in the tavern of the *Triple Tun*, then, because he felt deeply, spoke lightly.

"My lords and gentlemen," he said, "and you, John Nevil, whom I reverence as my commander and love as my friend, I give you thanks. Did we lose at Fayal? Then, this voyage, at some other golden island, we shall win! Honour stayed with us that bloody day, and shall we not now bring her home enthroned? Aye, and for her handmaidens fame and noble service and wealth

—wealth with which to send forth other ships, hounds of the sea which yet may pull down the Spanish stag of ten! By my faith, I sorrow for you whom we leave behind!"

"Look that I overtake you not, Mortimer!" cried Sidney. "Walter Raleigh and I have plans for next year. You and I may yet meet beneath a palm-tree!"

"And I also, Sir Mortimer," exclaimed Captain Philip Amadas. "Sir Walter hath promised me a ship——"

"When the old knight my father dies, and I come into my property," put in, loudly, a fancy-fired youth from Devon, "I'll go out over bar in a ship of my own! I'll have all my mariners dressed like Sir Hugh Willoughby's men in the picture, and when I come home——"

"Towing the King of Spain his plate fleet behind you," quoth the mustachioed gentleman.

"—all my sails shall be cloth of gold," continued wine-flushed one-and-twenty. "The main-deck shall be piled with bars of silver, and in the hold shall be pearls and pieces of gold, doubloons, emeralds as great as filberts——"

"At Panama saw I an emerald greater than a pigeon's egg!" cried one who had sailed in the *Golden Hind*.

Sir Mortimer laughed. "Why, our very speech grows rich—as did thine long since, Philip Sidney! And now, Giles Arden, show these stay-at-home gentlemen the stones the *Bonaventure* brought in the other day from that coast we touched at two years agone. If we miss the plate-fleet, my masters, if we find Cartagena or Santa Marta too strong for us, there is yet the unconquered land, the Hesperidian garden whence came these golden apples! Deliver, good dragon!"

He of the mustachios laid side by side upon the board three pieces of glittering rock, whereat every man bent forward.

"Marcasite?" said one, doubtfully.

"El madre del oro?" suggested another.

"White spar," said Arden, authoritatively, "and containeth of gold ten pounds to the hundredweight. Moreover——" He sifted down upon the dark wood beside the stones a thimbleful of dull yellow grains. "The sands of Pactolus, gentlemen! Sure 'twas in no Grecian river that King Midas bathed himself!"

Those of the company to whom had never

before been exhibited these samples of imperial riches craned their necks, and the looks of some were musing and of others keenly eager. The room fell silent, and still they gazed and gazed at the small heap of glistening stones and those few grains of gold. They were busy men in the vanguard of a quickened age, and theirs were its ardours, its Argus-eyed fancy and potent imagination. Show them an acorn, and straightway they saw a forest of oaks; an inch of a rainbow, and the mind grasped the whole vast arch, zenith-reaching, seven-coloured, enclosing far horizons. So now, in addition to the gleaming fragments upon the table before them, they saw mountain ranges with ledges of rock all sparkling like this ore, deep mines with Indian workers, pack-trains, and burdened holds of ships.

After a time one lifted a piece of the ore, hesitatingly, as though he made to take up all the Indies, scrutinized it closely, weighed it, passed it to his neighbour. It went the round of the company, each man handling it, each with the Talisman between his fingers gazing through the bars of this present hour at a pageant and phantasmagoria of his own creating. At length it came to the

hand of an old merchant, who held it a moment or two, looking steadfastly upon it, then slowly put it down.

"Well," said he, "may God send you furthering winds, Sir Mortimer and Sir John, and make their galleons and galliasses, their caravels and carracks, as bowed corn before you! Those of your company who are to die, may they die cleanly, and those who are to live, live nobly, and may not one of you fall into the hands of the Holy Office."

"Amen to that, Master Hudson," quoth Arden.

"The Holy Office!" cried a Banbury man. "I had a cousin, sirs—an honest fellow, with whom I had gone bird-nesting when we were boys together! He was master of a merchantman—the *Red Lion*—that by foul treachery was taken by the Spaniards at Cales. The priests put forth their hands and clutched him, who was ever outspoken, ever held fast to his own opinion! . . . To die! that is easy; but when I learned what was done to him before he was suffered to die——" The speaker broke off with a great oath and sat with fixed gaze, his hand beating upon the table a noiseless tattoo.

"To die," said Mortimer Ferne slowly.

"To die cleanly, having lived nobly—it is a good wish, Master Hudson! To die greatly—as did your cousin, sir—a good knight and true, defending faith and loyalty, what more consummate flower for crown of life? What loftier victory, supremer triumph? Pain of body, what is it? Let the body cry out, so that it betray not the mind, cheat not the soul into a remediless prison of perdition and shame!"

He drank of his wine, then with a slight laugh and wave of his hand dismissed a subject too grave for the hour. A little later he arose with his guests from the table, and since time was passing and for some there was much to do, men began to exchange farewells. To-morrow would see the adventurers gone from England; to-day kinsmen and friends must say good-bye, warmly, with clasping of hands and embracing—even with tears, for it was an age when men did not scorn to show emotion. A thousand perils awaited those who went, nor for those who stayed would time or tide make tarrying. It was most possible that they who parted now would find, this side eternity, no second inn of meeting.

From his perch beside the door, the boy

in blue and silver watched his master's guests step into the sunlight and go away. A throng had gathered in front of the tavern, for the most part of those within were men of note, and Sir John Nevil's adventure to the Indies had long been general talk. Singly or in little groups the revellers issued from the tavern, and for this or that known figure and known favourite the crowd had its comment and cheering. At last all were gone save the adventurers themselves, who, having certain final arrangements to make, stayed to hold counsel in the *Triple Tun's* long room.

Their conference was not long. Presently came forth Captain Baptist Manwood of the *Marigold* with his lieutenants, Wynch and Paget, and Captain Robert Baldry of the *Star*. The four, talking together, started toward the waterside where they were to take boat for the ships that lay above Greenwich, but ere they had gone forty paces Baldry felt his sleeve twitched. Turning, he found at his elbow the blue and silver sprig who served Sir Mortimer Ferne.

"Save you, sir," said the boy. "There's a gentleman at the *Triple Tun* desires your honour would give him five minutes of your company."

"I did expect a man of my acquaintance, a Paul's man with a good rapier to sell," quoth Baldry. "Boy, is the gentleman a lean gentleman with a Duke Humphrey look? Wait for me, sirs, at the stairs!"

Within the *Triple Tun*, Sir John Nevil yet sat at table pondering certain maps and charts spread out before him, while Mortimer Ferne, having re-entered the room after a moment's absence, leaned over his commander's shoulder and watched the latter's forefinger tracing the coastline from the Cape of Three Points to Golden Castile. By the window stood Arden, while on a settle near him lounged Henry Sedley, lieutenant to the captain of the *Cygnet;* moreover a young gentleman of great promise, a smooth, dark, melancholy beauty, and a pretty taste in dress. In his hands was a gittern which had been hanging on the wall above him, and he played upon it, softly, a sweet and plaintive air.

In upon these four burst Baldry, who, not finding the Paul's man and trader in rapiers, drew himself up sharply. Sir Mortimer came forward and made him a low bow, which he, not to be outdone in courtesy, any more than in weightier matters, returned in his own

manner, fierce and arrogant as that of a Spanish conquistador.

"Captain Robert Baldry, I trusted that you would return," said Ferne. "And now, since you are no longer guest of mine, we will resume our talk of Fayal in the Azores. Your gossips lied, sir; and he who, not staying to examine a quarrel, becomes a repeater of lies, may chance upon a summer day, in a tavern such as this, to be called a liar. My cartel, sir!"

He flung his glove, which scarce had felt the floor before the other snatched it up. "God's death! you shall be accommodated!" he cried. "Here and now, is't not? and with sword and dagger? Sir, I will spit you like a lark, or like the Spaniard I did vanquish for a Harry shilling at El Gran' Canario, last Luke's day——"

The three witnesses of the challenge sprang to their feet, the gittern falling from Sedley's hands, and Sir John's papers fluttering to the floor. The latter thrust himself between the two who had bared their weapons. "What is this, gentlemen? Mortimer Ferne, put up your sword! Captain Baldry, your valour may keep for the Spaniards! Obey me, sirs!"

"Let be, John Nevil," said Ferne. "To-morrow I become your sworn man. To-day my honour is my Admiral!"

"Will you walk, Sir Mortimer Ferne?" demanded Baldry. "The *Bull and Bear* just down the street, hath a little parlour—a most sweet retired place, and beareth no likeness to the poop of the *Mere Honour*. Sir John Nevil, your servant, sir—to-morrow!"

"My servant to-day, sir," thundered the Admiral, "in that I will force you to leave this quarrel! Death of my life! shall this get abroad? Not that common soldiers or mariners ashore fall out and cudgel each other until the one cannot handle a rope nor the other a morris-pike! not that wild gallants, reckless and broken adventurers, whose loss the next dare-devil scamp may supply, choose the eve of sailing for a duello, in which one or both may be slain; but that strive together, my captains, men vowed to noble service, loyal aid, whose names are in all mouths, who go forth upon this adventure not (I trust in God) with an eye single to the gain of the purse, but thinking, rather, to pluck green laurels for themselves, and to bring to the Queen of England gifts of waning danger, waxing power! What reproach—what evil

augury—nay, perhaps, what maiming of our enterprise! Leaders and commanders that you are, with your goodly ships, your mariners and soldiers awaiting you, and above us all the lodestar of noblest duty, truest honour—will you thus prefer to the common good your private quarrel! Nay, now, I might say 'you shall not'; but, instead, I choose to think you will not!"

The speech was of the longest for the Admiral, who was a man of golden silences. His look had been upon Baldry, but his words were for Mortimer Ferne, at whom he looked not at all. "I have been challenged, sir," cried Baldry, roughly. "Draw back? God's wounds, not I!"

His antagonist bit his lip until the blood sprang. "The insult was gross," he said, with haughtiness; "but since I may not deny the truth of your words, John Nevil, I will reword my cartel. Captain Robert Baldry, I do solemnly challenge you to meet me with sword and dagger upon that day which sees our return to England!"

"A far day that, perhaps," cried Baldry. "But so be it! I'll not fail you, Sir Mortimer Ferne. Look that you fail not me!"

"Sir!" cried Ferne, sharply.

The Admiral struck the table a great blow. "Gentlemen, no more of this! What! will you in this mood go forth side by side to meet a common foe? Nay, I must have you touch hands!"

The Captain of the *Cygnet* held out his hand. He of the *Star* first swore, then burst into a great laugh; finally laid his own upon it.

"Now we are turtle-doves, Sir John, nothing less! and the *Star* and the *Cygnet* may bill and coo from the Thames to Terra Firma!" Suddenly he ceased to laugh, and let fall his hand. "But I have not forgotten," he said, "that at Fayal in the Azores I had a brother slain."

He was gone, swinging from the room with scant ceremony, loudly ordering from his path the loiterers at the inn door. They whose company he had quitted were silent for a moment; then said Sir Mortimer, slowly: "I remember now—there was a Thomas Baldry, master of the *Speedwell*. Well, it was a sorry business that day! If from that muck of blood and horror was born Detraction——"

"The man was mad!" thrust in young Sedley, hotly. "Detraction and you have no acquaintance."

Ferne, with a slight laugh, stooped to pick up the fallen gittern. "She kept knighthood and me apart for a year, Henry. 'Tis a powerful dame, a most subtle and womanish foe, who knoweth not or esteemeth not the rules of chivalry. Henry yielded to plain Truth, she yet, as to-day, raiseth unawares an arm to strike." He hung the gittern upon its peg, then went across to the Admiral and put both hands upon his shoulders. The smile was yet upon his lips, but his voice had a bitter ring. "John, John," he said, "old wounds leave not their aching. That tall, fanfaronading fellow hath a power to anger me—not his words alone, but the man himself. . . . Well, let him go until the day we come sailing back to England! For his words——" He paused and a shadow came over his face. "Who knows himself?" he said. "There are times when I look within and doubt my every quality that men are pleased to give me. God smiles upon me—perhaps He smiles with contempt! . . . I would that I had followed, not led, that day at Fayal!"

Arden burst into a laugh. The Admiral turned and stared at him who had spoken with a countenance half severity, half deep affection. "What! stings that yet?" he

said. "I think you may have that knowledge of yourself that you were born to lead, and that knowledge of higher things that shame is of the devil, but defeat ofttimes of God. How idly do we talk to-day!"

"Idly enough," agreed Ferne with a quick sigh. He lifted his hands from the other's shoulders, with an effort too instantaneous to be apparent shook off his melancholy. Arden took up his hat and swung his short cloak over his shoulder.

"Since we may not fight," he said, "I'll e'en go play. There's a pretty lady hard by who loves me dearly. I'll go tell her tales of the Carib beauties. Master Sedley, you are for the court, I know. Would the gods had sent me such a sister! Do you go to Leicester House, Mortimer? If not, my fair Discretion hath a mate——"

"I," answered Ferne, "am also for Greenwich."

Arden laughed again. "Her Grace gives you yet another audience? Or is it that hath come to court that Nonpareil, that radiant Incognita, that be-rhymed Dione at whose real name you keep us guessing? I thought the violet satin was not for naught!"

"In that you speak with truth," said the other coolly, "for thirty acres of good Devon land went to its procuring. Since you are for the court, Henry Sedley, one wherry may carry the two of us."

When the two adventurers and the boy in blue and silver had made half the distance to the pleasant palace where, like a flight of multi-coloured birds, had settled for the moment Elizabeth's migratory court, the gentlemen became taciturn and fell at length to silent musing, each upon his own affairs. The boy liked it not, for their discourse had been of armour and devices, of war-horses and Spanish swords, and such knightly matters as pleased him to the marrow. He himself (Robin-a-dale they called him) meant to be altogether such a one as his master in violet satin. Not a sea-dog simply and terrible fighter like Captain Manwood or Ambrose Wynch, nor a ruffler like Baldry, nor even a high, cold gentleman like Sir John, who slew Spaniards for the good of God and the Queen, and whose slow words when he was displeased cut like a rope's end. But he would fight and he would sing; he would laugh with his foe and then courteously kill him; he would know how to enter the presence,

how to make a great Queen smile and sigh; and then again, amid the thunder and reek of the fight, on decks slippery with blood, he would strain, half naked with the mariners, he would lead the boarders, he would deal death with a flashing sword, and a face that, seen through the smoke wreaths, was so calm and high!—And the Queen might knight him—one day the Queen might knight him. And the people at home, turning in the street, would look and cry, "'Tis Sir Robert Dale!" as now they cry "Sir Mortimer Ferne!"

Robin-a-dale drew in his breath and clenched his hands with determination; then, the key being too high for long sustaining, came down to earth and the contemplation of the bright-running Thames, its shifting banks, and the shipping on its bosom. The river glided between tall houses, and there were voices on the water, sounding from stately barges, swift-plying wherries, ships at anchor, both great and small. Over all played mild sunshine, hung pale blue skies. The boy thought of other rivers he had seen and would see again, silent streams gliding through forests of a fearful loveliness, miles of churned foam rushing between black teeth

of jagged rock to the sheer, desperate, earth-shaking cataract, liquid highways to the realm of strange dreams! He turned involuntarily and met his master's eye. Between these two, master and boy, knave and knight, there was at times so strange a comprehension that Robin-a-dale was scarcely startled to find that his thoughts had been read.

"Aye, Robin," said Ferne smiling, "other and stranger waters than those of Father Thames! And yet I know not. Life is one, though to-day we glide through the sunshine to a fair Queen's palace, and to-morrow we strive like fiends from hell for those two sirens Lust of Gold and Lust of Blood. Therefore, Robin, an you toss your silver brooch into the Thames it may come to hand on the other side of the world, swirling toward you in some Arethusa fountain."

"I see the ships, master!" cried the boy. "Ho, the *Cygnet*, the bonny white *Cygnet!*

They lay in a half-moon, with the westering sun striking full upon the windows of their high, castellated poops. Their great guns gleamed; mast and spar and rigging made network against the blue; high in air floated bright pennants and the red cross in the white field. To and fro plied

small boats, while over the water to them in the wherry came a pleasant hum of preparation for the morrow's sailing. Upon the *Cygnet*, lying next to the *Mere Honour*, and a very noble ship, the mariners began to sing.

"Shall we not row more closely?" cried Sedley. "The *Cygnet* knows not that it is you who pass!"

Sir Mortimer laughed. "No, no; I come to her arms from the Palace to-night! Trouble her not with genuflexions and salutings!" His eyes dwelt with love upon his ship. "How clearly sounds the singing!" he said.

So clearly did it sound over the water that it kept with them when the ships were passed. Robin-a-dale had his fancies, to which at times he gave voice, scarce knowing that he had spoken. "'Tis the ship herself that sings," he now began to say to himself in a low voice, over and over again. "'Tis the ship singing, the ship singing because she goes on a voyage—a long voyage!"

"Sirrah!" cried his master, somewhat sharply. "Know you not that the swan sings but upon one voyage, and that her last? 'Tis not the *Cygnet* that sings, but upon her

sing my mariners and soldiers, for that they go forth to victory!"

He put his hands behind his head, and with a light in his eyes looked back to the dwindling ships. "Victory!" he repeated beneath his breath. "Such fame, such service, as that earthworm, that same Detraction, shall raise no more her lying head!" He turned to Sedley: "I am glad, Harry, that your lot is cast with mine. For we go forth to victory, lad!"

The young man answered him impetuously, a flush of pride mounting to his smooth, dark cheek. "I doubt it not, Sir Mortimer, nor of my gathering laurels, since I go with you! I count myself most fortunate." He threw back his head and laughed. "I have no lady-love," he said, "and so I will heap the laurels in the lap of my sister Damaris."

By now, the tide being with them, they were nearing Greenwich Palace. Ferne dipped his hand into the water, then, straightening himself, shook from it the sparkling drops, and looked in the face of the youth who was to make with him his maiden voyage.

"You could heap laurels in the lap of no sweeter lady," he said, courteously. "I thought you went on yesterday to say farewell to Mistress Damaris Sedley."

"Why, so I did," said the other, simply. "We said farewell with our eyes in the presence, while the Queen talked with my Lord of Leicester; in the antechamber with our hands; in the long gallery with our lips; and when we reached the gardens, and there was none at all to see, we e'en put our arms about each other and wept. It is a right noble wench, my sister, and loves me dearly. And then, while we talked, one of her fellow-maids came hurriedly to call her, for her Grace would go a-hawking, and Damaris was in attendance. So I swore I would see her again to-day though 'twere but for a moment."

The rowers brought the wherry to the Palace landing. Sir Mortimer, stepping out upon the broad stairs, began to mount them somewhat slowly, Sedley and Robin-a-dale following him. Half-way up, Sedley, noting the rich suit worn so point-device, and aware of how full in the sunshine of the Queen's favour stood for the moment his Captain, asked if he were for the presence. Ferne shook his head: "Not now. . . . May I know, Henry, where you and your sister meet?"

"In the little covert of the park where we said good-bye on yesterday." There were surprise and some question in the youth's upward glance at the man in violet satin,

standing a step or two above him, his hand resting upon the stone balustrade, a smile in his eyes, but none upon the finely cut lips, quite grave and steady beneath the slight moustache.

Ferne, reading the question, gave, after just a moment's pause, the answer. "My dear lad," he said, and the smile in his eyes grew more distinct and kindly, "to Mistress Damaris Sedley I also would say farewell." He laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder. "For I would know, Henry—I would know if through all the days and nights that await us over the brim of to-morrow I may dream of an hour to come when that dear and fair lady shall bid me welcome." His eyes looked into the distance, and the smile had crept to his lips. "It was my meaning to speak to her to-night before I left the Palace, but this chance offers better. Will you give me precedence, Henry? let me see and speak to your sister alone in that same covert of which you tell me?"

"But—but—" stammered Sedley.

Sir Mortimer laughed. "'But . . . Dione!' you would say. 'Ah, faithless poet, forsworn knight!' you would say. Not so, my friend." He looked far away with shining eyes. "That unknown nymph, that lady

whom I praise in verse, whose poet I am, that Dione at whose real name you all do vainly guess—it is thy sister, lad! Nay—she knows me not for her worshipper, nor do I know that I can win her love. I would try. . . ."

Sedley's smooth cheek glowed and his eyes shone. He was young; he loved his sister, orphaned like himself and the neglected ward of a decaying house; while to his ardent fancy the man above him, superb in his violet dress, courteous and excellent in all that he did, was a very Palmerin or Amadis de Gaul. Now, impetuously, he put his hand upon that other hand touching his shoulder, and drew it to his lips in a caress, of which, being Elizabethans, neither was at all ashamed. In the dark, deeply-fringed eyes that he raised to his leader's face there was a boyish and poetic adoration for the sea-captain, the man of war who was yet a courtier and a scholar, the violet knight who was yet to lead him up the heights which long ago the knight himself had scaled.

"Damaris is a fair maid, and good and learned," he said in a whisper, half shy, half eager. "May you dream as you wish, Sir Mortimer! For the way to the covert—'tis by yonder path that's all in sunshine."

CHAPTER II

BENEATH a great oak-tree, where light and shadow made a checkered round, Mistress Damaris Sedley sat upon the earth in a gown of rose-coloured silk. Across her knee, under her clasped hands, lay a light racquet, for she had strayed this way from battledore and shuttlecock and the sprightly company of maids of honour and gentlemen pensioners engaged thereat. She was a fair lady, of a clear pallor, with a red mouth very subtly charming, and dark eyes between level brows. Her eyes had depths on depths: to one player of battledore and shuttlecock they were merely large brown orbs; another might find in them worlds below worlds; a third, going deeper, might, Actæon-like, surprise the bare soul. A curiously wrought net of gold caught her dark hair in its meshes, and pearls were in her ears, and around the white column of her throat rising between the ruff's gossamer walls. She fingered the

racquet, idly listening the while for a foot-fall beyond her round of trees. Hearing it at last, and taking it for her brother's, she looked up with a proud and tender smile.

"Fie upon thee for a laggard, Henry!" she began: "I warrant thy Captain meets not his Dione with so slow a step!" Then, seeing who stood before her, she left her seat between the oak roots and curtsied low. "Sir Mortimer Ferne," she said, and rising to her full height, met his eyes with that deeper gaze of hers.

Ferne advanced, and bending his knee to the short turf, took and kissed her hand. "Fair and sweet lady," he said, "I made suit to your brother, and he has given me, his friend, this happy chance. Now I make my supplication to you, to whom I would be that, and more. All this week have I vainly sought for speech with you alone. But now these blessed trees hem us round; there is none to spy or listen—and here is a mossy bank, fit throne for a faery queen. Will you hear me speak?"

The maid of honour looked at him with rose bloom upon her cheek, and in her eyes, although they smiled, a moisture as of half-sprung tears. "Is it of Henry?" she asked.

"Ah, sir, you have been so good to him! He is very dear to me. . . . I would that I could thank you——"

As she spoke she moved with him to the green bank, sat down, and clasped her hands about her knees. The man who on the morrow should leave behind him court and court ways, and all fair sights such as this, leaned against the oak and looked down upon her. When, after a little silence, he began to speak, it was like a right courtier of the day.

"Fair Mistress Damaris," he said, "your brother is my friend, but to-day I would speak of my friend's friend, and that is myself, and your servant, lady. To-morrow I go from this garden of the world, this northern Paradise, this court where Dian reigns, but where Venus comes as a guest, her boy in her hand. Where I go I know not, nor what thread Clotho is spinning. Strange dangers are to be found in strange places, and Jove and lightning are not comfortable neighbours. Ulysses took moly in his hand when there came to meet him Circe's gentlemen pensioners, and Gyges' ring not only saved him from the peril, but brought him wealth and great honour. What silly mariner in my ship hath not bought or begged mithri-

date or a pinch of achimenius wherewith to make good his voyage? And shall not I, who have much more at stake, procure me an enchantment?"

The lady's fringed lids lifted in one swift upward glance. "Your valour, sir, should prove your surest charm. But there is the new alchemist——"

"He cannot serve my need, hath not what I want. I want——" He hesitated for a moment; then spoke on with a certain restrained impetuosity that became him well: "There is a honey-wax which, being glazed about the heart, holdeth with it, for ever, a song so sweet that the chanting of the sirens matters not; there is that precious stone which, as the magnet draweth the iron, so ever constraineth Honour, bidding him mount every breach, climb higher, higher, higher yet! there is that fragrant leaf which oft is fed with tears, and often sighing worn, yet, so worn, inspireth valour more heroical than that of Achilles! Such a charm I seek, sweet lady."

Mistress Damaris Sedley, a favourite of the Countess of Pembroke, and a court lady of some months' standing, could parley Euphuism with the best, and yet to-day it seemed to her

that plain English might better serve the turn. However:

"Good gentleman," she answered, sedately, "I think that few are the bees that gather so dainty a wax, but if they be flown to Hymettus, then to Hymettus might one follow them: also that precious stone may be found, though, alack! often enough a man is so poor a lapidary that, seeing only the covering of circumstances, he misses the true sapphire! and for that fragrant leaf, I have heard of it in my day——"

"It is called true love," he said.

Damaris kept to the card: "My marvel, sir, is to hear you speak as though you had not the charm you seem to seek. One blossom of the tree Alpina is worth all store of roses; one ruby outvalueth many pearls; he who hath already the word of magic needeth to buy no Venus' image; and Sir Mortimer Ferne, secure in Dione's love, saileth, methinks, in crystal seas, with slight danger from storm and wreck."

"Secure in Dione's love!" repeated Ferne. "Ah, lady, your shaft has gone wide. I have sailed, and sailed, and sailed—ay, and in crystal seas—and have seen blooms fairer than the tree Alpina, and have been in the

land of emeralds and where pearls do grow, and yet have never gathered the fragrant leaf, that leaf of true and mutual love. It should grow with the laurel and blend with the bay—ay, and be not missing from the cypress wreath! But as yet I have it not—as yet I have it not."

Damaris gazed upon him with brown, incredulous eyes, and when she spoke her words came somewhat breathlessly, having quite outgone the courtly affectation of similes run mad.

"What mean you, sir? Not the love of Astrophel for Stella is better known than that of Cleon for Dione! And, lo! now your own lines—Master Dyer showed them to me but the other day copied into his book of songs—

> 'Nor in my watery wanderings am I crossed;
> Where haven's wanted, there I haven find,
> Nor e'er for me is star of guidance lost——'"

Her voice breaking a little, Ferne made nearer approach to the green bank where she rested. "Do you learn by heart my verses, lady?" he asked.

"Ay," she answered, "I did ever love sweet poetry." Her voice thrilled, and she

gazed past him at the blue heaven showing between the oak leaves. "If prayer with every branch availeth," she said, "no doubt your Dione will bring your safe return."

"Of whom do I write, calling her Dione?"

She shook her head. "I know not. None of us at court knows. Master Dyer saith—but surely that one is not worthy——" She broke off, nor knew there had been in her tone both pain and wistfulness. Presently she laughed out, with the facile gaiety that one in her position must needs be practised in. "Ah, sir, tell me her name! Is she of the court?"

He nodded, "Yes."

Damaris clapped her hands. "What lovely hypocrite have we among us? What Lady Pure Innocence, wondering with the rest of the world?—and all the while Cleon's latest sonnet hot against her heart! Is she tall, sir, or short?"

"Of your height."

The lady shrugged. "Oh, I like not your half-way people! And her hair—but halt! We know her hair is dark—

'Ah, darkness loved beyond all light!'

Her eyes——"

He bent his head, moving yet nearer to her. "Her eyes are wonderful! Where got you your eyes, Dione—Dione?"

Crimsoning deeply, Damaris started up, the racquet escaping her clasp, and her hands going out in a gesture of dismay and anger. "Sir—sir," she stammered, "since you make a mock of me, I will be gone. No, sir; let me pass! Ah, . . . how unworthy of you!"

Ferne had caught her by the wrists. "No, no! Dear lady, to whom I am well-nigh a stranger—sweetheart with whom I have talked scarce thrice in all my life—my Dione, to whom my heart is as a crystal, to whom I have written all things! I must speak now, now, before I go this voyage! Think you it is in me to vex with saucy words, to make a mock of any gentle lady?"

"I know not what to think," she answered, in a strange voice. "I am too dull to understand."

"Think that I tell you God's truth!" he cried. "Understand that——" He checked himself, seeing how pale she was and how fluttering came her breath; then, trained as she herself instantly to draw an airy veil between true feeling and the exigency of the moment, he became once more the simple

courtier. "You read the songs that I make, sweet lady," he said, "and now will you listen while I tell you a story, a *novella?* So I may make you to understand."

As he spoke he motioned to the mossy seat which she had quitted. She raised her troubled eyes to his; then, with her scarlet lip between her teeth, she took her seat again. For a minute there was silence in the little grove, broken only by the distant voices of the players whose company she had forsworn; then Ferne began his story—

"In a fair grassy plain, not many leagues removed from the hill Parnassus, a shepherd named Cleon sat upon a stone, piping to himself while he watched his sheep, and now and then singing aloud, so that the other shepherds and dwellers of the plain, and travellers through it, paused to hear his song. He sang not often, and often he laid his pipe aside, for he had much to think of, having been upon the other side of the mountain, and having seen cities and camps and courts —for indeed he was not always shepherd. And now, because his thoughts left the plain to hover over the place where danger is, to visit strange coasts and Ultima Thule, to

strain ever towards those islands of the blest where goes the man who has endured to the end, his notes when he sang or when he played became warlike, resolved, speaking of death and fame and stern things, or of things of public weal. . . . But all the time the shepherd was a lonely man, because his spirit was too busy to find ease for itself, and because, though he had helped other shepherds in the building of their cottages, his own heart had no hearthstone where he might warm himself and be content. Sometimes as he lay alone upon the bare earth, counting the stars, he caught the gleam from such a home clear shining over the plain, and he told himself that when he had numbered all the stars like sheep in a fold, then would he return and give his heart rest beside some lower light. . . . So he kept on with his Phrygian melodies, and they brought him friends and enemies ; but no lover hastening over the plain stayed to listen, and the shepherd was sorry for that, because he thought that the others, though they heard, did not fully understand."

The narrator paused. The maid of honour's hands were idle in her lap ; with level gaze she sat in a dream. " Yet some there be who

might have understood," she said, and scarce knew that she had spoken.

"Now Cleon had a friend whom he loved, the shepherd Astrophel, who sang more sweetly than any in all the plain, and Astrophel would oft urge Cleon to his dwelling, which was a fair one, with shady groves, sunny lawns, and springing fountains."

"Ah, sweet Sidney, dear Penshurst!" breathed the lady softly.

"Now upon a day—indeed, 'tis little more than a year ago—Cleon, returning to the plain from a far journey, found Astrophel, who, taking no denial, would have him to those sunny lawns and springing fountains. There was dust upon the spirit of the Shepherd Cleon: that had happened which had left in his mouth the taste of Dead Sea fruit; almost was he ready to break his pipe across, and to sit still for ever, covering his face. But Astrophel, knowing in himself how he would have felt in his dearest part that wound which his friend had received, was skilled to heal, and with wise counsel and honeyed words at last won Cleon to visit him."

"A year and more ago," said Damaris dreamily.

"On such a day as this, Cleon and Astrophel came to the latter's home, where, since Astrophel was as a magnet-stone to draw unto him the noblest of his kind, they found a goodly gathering of the chiefest of the dwellers in the plain. Nor were lacking young shepherdesses, nymphs, and ladies as virtuous as they were fair, for Astrophel's sister was such an one as Astrophel's sister should be."

"Most dear, most sweet Countess," murmured Damaris.

"Cleon and Astrophel were made welcome by this goodly company, after which all addressed themselves to those sports of that country for which the day had been devised. But though he made merry with the rest, nor was in anything behind them, Cleon's heart was yet heavy within him. Aurora, fast flying, turned a rosy cheek, then the night hid her path with his spangled mantle, and all this company of shepherdish folk left the grey lawns for Astrophel's house, that was lit with clear wax and smelled sweet of roses. And after a while, when there had been comfit talk and sipping of sweet wine, one sang, and another followed, while the company listened, for they were of those who

have ears to hear. Colin sang of Rosalind; Damon, of Myra; Astrophel, of Stella; Cleon of—none of these things. 'Sing of love!' they cried, and he sang of friendship; 'Of the love of a woman!' and he sang of the honour of a man."

"But in the contest he won the Countess's pearl," said the maid of honour, her chin in her hands; "I knew (dear lady!) what, being woman, was her inmost thought, and in my heart I did applaud her choice."

The man bent his eyes upon her for a moment, then went on with his story, but somewhat slowly.

"When it had thus ended the day, that goodly company betook itself to rest. But Cleon tossed upon his bed, and at the dawn, when the birds began to sing, he arose, dressed himself, and went forth into the dewy gardens of that lovely place. Here he walked up and down, for his unrest would not leave him, and his heart hungered for food it had never tasted. . . . There was a fountain springing from a stone basin, and all around were set rose-bushes, seen dimly because of the mist. Presently, when the light was stronger, issued from the house one of those nymphs whom Astrophel's sister

delighted to gather around her, and coming to the fountain, began to search about its rim for a jewel that had been lost. She moved like a mist wreath in that misty place, but Cleon saw that her eyes were dark, and her lips a scarlet flower, and that grace was in all her motions. He remembered her name, and that she was loved of Astrophel's sister, and how sweet a lady she was called. Now he watched her weaving places in the mist, and his fancy worked. . . . The mist lifted, and a sudden sunshine lit her into splendour ; face, form, spirit, all, all her being into fadeless splendour—into fadeless splendour, Dione ! "

The maid of honour left once more her grassy throne, and turning from him, moved a step away, then with raised arms clasped her hands behind her head. Her upturned face was hidden from him, but he saw her white bosom rise and fall. He had made pause, but now he continued his story, though with a changed voice.

" And Cleon, going to her with due greeting, knelt ; she thought (sweet soul !) to help her in her search, but indeed he knelt to her, for now he knew that the gods had given him also—to love a woman. But because

the blind boy's shaft, designed to work inward ever deeper and deeper until it reached the heart's core, did now but ensanguine itself, he made no cry nor any sign of that sweet hurt. He found and gave the nymph the jewel she had lost, and broke for her the red, red roses, and while the birds did carol he led her through the morning to the entrance of the house. Up the stone stairs went she, and turned in splendour at the top. A red rose fell . . . the sunlight passed into the house."

The voice of the speaker altered, came nearer the ear of her who stood with heaving bosom, with upturned face, with hands locked tight upon the wonder of this hour.

"The rose, the rose has faded, Dione," said the ardent voice. "Look how dead it lies upon my palm! But bend and breathe upon it, and it will bloom again! Ah, that day at Penshurst! when I sought you and they told me you were gone—a brother ill and calling for you—a guardian, no friend of mine, to whose house I had not access! And then the Queen must send for me, and there was service to be done—service which got me my knighthood. . . . The stream between us widened. At first I thought to span it

with a letter, and then I wrote it not. 'Twas all too frail a bridge to trust my hope upon. For what should have the paper said? *I am so near a stranger to thee that scarce have we spoken twice together—therefore love me! I am a man who hath done somewhat in the busy world and shall, God willing, labour once again, but now a cloud o'ershadows me—therefore love me! I have no wealth or pomp of place to give thee, and I myself am of those whom God hath bound to wander—therefore love me! I chanced upon thee beside a fountain ringed with roses, grey with mist; the sun came out and I saw thee, golden in the golden light,—therefore love me!* Ah, no! you would have answered—I know not what. Therefore I waited, for I have at times a strange patience, a willingness to let Fate guide me. Moreover, I ever thought to meet you, to speak with you face to face again, but it fell not so. Was I with the court, the country claimed you; went I north or west, needs must I hear of you a lovely star within that galaxy I had left. Thrice were we in company together—cursed spite that gave us only time for courtly greeting, courtly parting!"

The voice came nearer, came very near—

"Have I said that I wrote not to you? Ay, but I did, my only dear! And as I wrote, from the court, from the camp, from my poor house of Ferne, I said: 'This will tell her how in her I reverence womankind, and, 'These are flowers for her coronal—will she not know it among a thousand wreaths?' and, 'This, ah, this, will show her how deeply now hath worked the arrow!' and, 'Now she cannot choose but know—her soul will hear my soul cry!' And that those letters might come to your eyes, I, following the fashion, sealed them only with feigned names, altered circumstance. All who ran might read, but the heart-beat was for your ear . . . Dione! Didst never guess?"

She answered in a still voice, without moving: "It may be that my soul guessed. . . . If it did so, it was frightened and hid its guess."

"I have told you," said the man. "But, ah, what am I more to you now than on that morn at Penshurst—a stranger! I know not—even you may love another. . . . But no, I know that you do not. As I was then, so am I now, save that I have served the Queen again, and that cloud I spoke of is

overpast. I must go forth to-morrow to seek, to find, to win, to lose—God He knoweth what! I would go as your knight avowed, your favour in my helm, your kiss like holy water on my brow. See, I kneel to you for some sign, some charm, to make my voyage good!"

Very slowly the rose-clad maid of honour let fall her gaze from the evening skies to the man before her; as slowly unclasped her hands so tightly locked behind her upraised head. Her eyes were wide and filled with light, her bosom yet rose and fell quickly; in all her mien there was still wonder, grace supreme, a rich unfolding like the opening of a flower to the bliss of understanding. Trembling, her hand went down, and resting on his shoulder, gave him her accolade. She bowed herself toward him; a knot of rosy velvet, loosened from her dress, fell upon the turf beside his knee. Ferne caught up the ribbon, pressed it to his lips and thrust it in the breast of his doublet. Rising, he took her in his arms and they kissed. Her breath came pantingly.

"Oh, I envied her!" she cried. "Now I know that I envied while I blessed her—that unknown Dione!"

"My lady and my only dear!" he said. "Oh, Love is as the sun! So the sunshine bide, let come what will come!"

"I rest in the sunshine!" she said. "Oh, Love is bliss . . . but anguish too! I see the white sails of your ships."

She shuddered in his arms. "All that go return not. Ah, tell me that you will come back to me!"

"That will I do," he answered, "an I am a living man. If I die, I shall but wait for thee. I see no parting of our ways."

One hour was theirs. Bread and wine, and flower and fruit, and meeting and parting it held for them. Hand in hand they sat upon the grassy bank, and eyes met eyes, but speech came not often to their lips. They looked and loved, against the winter storing each moment with sweet knowledge, honeyed assurance. Brave and fair they were both, gallant lovers in a gallant time, changing love-looks in a Queen's garden, above the silver Thames. A tide of amethyst fell the sunset light; the swallows circled overhead; a sound was heard of singing voices; violet knight and rose-coloured maid of honour, they came at last to say farewell. That night in the lit Palace, amid the garish

crowd, they might see each other again, might touch hands, might even have slight speech together, but not as now could heart speak to heart. They rose from the green bank, and as the sun set, as the moon came out, and the singing ceased, and the world grew ashen, they said what lovers say on the brink of absence, and at last they kissed good-bye.

CHAPTER III

THEY were not far north of the Canary Islands, when the sky, which for several days had been overcast, grew very threatening, and the *Mere Honour*, the *Cygnet*, the *Marigold*, and the *Star* made ready to meet what fury the Lord should be pleased to loose upon them. It came, a maniac unchained, and scattered the ships. Darkness accompanied it, and the sea wrinkled beneath its feet. The ships went here and went there; throughout the night they burned lights, and fired many great pieces of ordnance—not to prevail against their enemy, but to say each to the other: "Here am I, my sister! Go not too far, come not too near!" Their voices were as whispers to the shouting of their foe; beneath the rolling thunders the sound of cannon and culverin were of less account than the grating of pebbles in a furious surge.

Day came, and the storm continued, but with night the wind fell and quiet possessed

the deep. The sea subsided, and just before dawn the clouds broke, showing a waning moon. Below it suddenly sprang out two lights, one above the other, and to the *Cygnet*, safe, though with her plumage sadly ruffled, came the sound of a gun twice fired.

The darkness faded, the grey light strengthened, and showed to the watchers upon the *Cygnet's* decks the ship in distress. It was Baldry's ship, the little *Star*. She lay rolling heavily in the heavy sea, her masts gone, her boats swept away, her poop low in the water, her beakhead high, sinking by the stern. Her lights yet burned, ghastly in the dawning; her people, a black swarm upon her forecastle, lay clinging, devouring with their eyes the *Cygnet's* boats coming for their deliverance across the grey waste. Of the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold* nothing was to be seen.

The swarm descended into the boats, and all pushed off from the doomed ship save a single craft, less crowded than the others, which waited, its occupants gesticulating angry dismay, for the one man who had not left the *Star*. He stood erect upon her bowsprit, a dark figure outlined against the livid sky.

The watchers upon the *Cygnet*, from Captain

to least powder-boy, drew quick breath.

"Ah, sirs, he loved the *Star* like a woman!" ejaculated Thynne the master, and, "He swore terribly, but he was a mighty man!" testified the chief gunner. Robin-a-dale swung himself to and fro in an ecstasy of terror. "He rides—he rides so high!" he shrilled. "Higher than the gallows-tree! And he stands so quiet while he rides!"

Upon the poop young Sedley, standing beside his Captain, veiled his eyes with his hand; then, ashamed of his weakness, gazed steadfastly at the lifted figure. Arden, drumming with his fingers upon the rail, looked sideways at Sir Mortimer Ferne.

"It seems that your quarrel will have to wait some other meeting-place than England," he said. "Perhaps the laws of that *terra incognita* to which he goes forbid the duello."

"He will not leave our company yet awhile," answered Ferne, with calmness. "As I thought——"

The dark figure had dropped from the bowsprit of the *Star* into the waiting boat, which at once put after its fellows. Behind the deserted ship suddenly streamed out a

red banner of the dawn; stark and black against the colour, lonely in the path that must be trod, she awaited her end. To the seafaring men who watched her she was as human as themselves—a ship dying alone.

"All that a man hath will he give for his life," quoth Arden, somewhat grimly, for he was no lover of Baldry, and he was now ashamed of the emotion he had shown.

"To go down with her," said Ferne, slowly—"that had been the act of a madman. And if to live is a thing less fine than would have been that madness, yet——"

He broke off, and turning from the *Star*, now very near her death, swept with his gaze the billowing ocean. "I would we might see the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold*," he said impatiently. "What is lost is lost, and Captain Baldry as well as we must stand this crippling of our enterprise. But the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold* are of more account than the *Star*."

Out of a cluster of mariners and landsmen rose Robin-a-dale's shrill cry: "She's going down, down, down! Oh, the white figurehead looks no more into the sea—it turns its face to the sky! Down, down: the *Star* has gone down!"

A silence fell upon the decks of the *Cygnet* and upon the overfreighted boats labouring towards her. Overhead mast and spar creaked and the low wind sang in the rigging, but the spirit of man was awed within him. A ship was lost, and the sea was lonely beneath the crimson dawn. Where were the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold*, and was all their adventure but a mirage and a cheat? Far away was home, and far away the Indies, and the *Cygnet* was a little feather tossed between red sky and heaving ocean.

The thought did not last. As the crowded boats drew alongside, up sprang the sun, cheering and warming, and at the Captain's command the musicians of the *Cygnet* began to play, as at the setting of the watch, a psalm of thanksgiving. Sailors and volunteers, there had been but sixty men aboard the *Star*, and all were safe. As they clambered over the side, a cheer went up from their comrades of the *Cygnet*.

The boat that carried Baldry came last, and that adventurer was the latest to set foot upon the *Cygnet's* deck. Her Captain met him with bared head and outstretched hand.

"We grieve with you, sir, for the loss of

the *Star*," he said gravely and courteously. "We thank God that no brave man went down with her. The *Cygnet* gives you welcome, sir."

The man to whom he spoke ignored alike words and extended hand. A towering figure, breathing bitter anger at this spite of Fortune, he turned where he stood and gazed upon the ocean that had swallowed up his ship. Uncouth of nature, given to boasting, a foster-child of Violence and Envy, he yet had qualities which had borne him upward and onward from mean beginnings to where on yesterday he had stood, owner and Captain of the *Star*, leader of picked men, seadog and adventurer as famed for daredevil courage and boundless endurance as for his braggadocio vein and sullen temper. Now the *Star* that he had loved was at the bottom of the sea; his men, a handful beside the *Cygnet's* force, must give obedience to her officers; and he himself—what was he more than a volunteer aboard his enemy's ship? Captain Robert Baldry, grinding his teeth, found the situation intolerable.

Sir Mortimer Ferne, biting his lip in a sudden revulsion of feeling, was of much the same opinion. But that he would follow

after courtesy was as certain as that Baldry would pursue his own will and impulse. Therefore he spoke again, though scarce as cordially as before—

"We will shape our course for Teneriffe, where (I pray to God) we may find the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold*. If it please Captain Baldry to then remove into the *Mere Honour*, I make no doubt that the Admiral will welcome so notable a recruit. In the mean time your men shall be cared for, and you yourself will command me, sir, in all things that concern your welfare."

Baldry shot him a look. "I am no maker of pretty speeches," he said. "You have me in irons. Pray you, show me some dungeon and give me leave to be alone."

Young Sedley, hotly indignant, muttered something, that was echoed by the little throng of gentlemen adventurers sailing with Sir Mortimer Ferne. Arden, leaning against the mast, coolly observant of all, began to whistle,

> "Of honey and of gall in love there is store:
> The honey is much, but the gall is more,"

thereby bringing upon himself one of Baldry's black glances.

"Lieutenant Sedley," ordered Ferne,

sharply, "you will lodge this gentleman in the cabin next mine own, seeing that he hath all needful entertainment. Sir, I do expect your company at dinner."

He bowed, then stood at his full height, while Baldry sufficiently bethought himself to in some sort return the salute, even to give grudging, half-insolent acknowledgment of the debt he owed the *Cygnet*. At last he went below—to refuse the bread and meat, but to drink deep of the *aqua vitæ* which Sedley stiffly offered; then to lock himself in his cabin, bite his nails with rage, and finally, when he had stared at the sea for a long time, to sink his head into his hands and weep a man's tears for irrevocable loss.

Of his fellow adventurers whom he left upon the poop, only Mortimer Ferne held his tongue from blame of his insupportable temper, or refrained from stories of the *Star's* exploits. The *Cygnet* was under way, the wind favourable, her white and swelling canvas like clouds against a bright-blue sky, the dolphins playing about her rushing prow, where a golden lady for ever kept her eyes upon the deep. In the wind, timber and cordage creaked and sang, while from the waist and main-deck came a cheerful sound

of men at work repairing what damage the storm had wrought. Thynne the master gave orders in his rumbling bass, then the drum beat for morning service, and, after the godly fashion of the time, there poured from the forecastle, to worship the Lord, mariners, and landsmen, gunners, harquebusiers, cross-bow and pike men, cabin and powder boys, cook, chirurgeon, and carpenter—all the varied force of that floating castle destined to be dashed like a battering ram against the power of Spain. The Captain of them all, with his gentlemen and officers about him, paused a moment before moving to his accustomed place, and looked upon his ship from stem to stern, from the thronged decks to the topmost pennant flaunting the sunshine. He found it good, and the salt of life was strong in his nostrils. Inwardly he prayed for the safety of the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold*, but that picture of the sinking *Star* he dismissed as far as might be from his mind. She had been but a small ship—notorious indeed for fights against great odds, for sheer bravado and hair-breadth escapes, but still a small ship, and not to be compared with the *Cygnet*. No life had been forfeited, and Captain Robert

Baldry must even digest as best he might his private loss and discomfiture. If, as he walked to his place of honour, and as he stood with English gentlemen about him, with English sailors and soldiers ranged before him giving thanks for deliverance from danger, the Captain of the *Cygnet* held too high his head; if he at that moment looked upon his life with too conscious a pride, knew too well the difference between himself, steadfast helmsman of all his being, and that untutored nature which drove another from rock to shoal, from shoal to quicksand—yet that knowledge, detestable to all the gods, dragged at his soul but for a moment. He bent his head and prayed for the missing ships, and most heartily for John Nevil, his Admiral, whom he loved; then for Damaris Sedley, that she be kept in health and joyousness of mind; and lastly, believing that he but plead for the success of an English expedition against Spain and Antichrist, he prayed for gold and power, a sovereign's gratitude and man's acclaim.

Three days later they came to Teneriffe, and to their great rejoicing found there the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold*. The Admiral signalled a council; and Ferne,

taking with him Giles Arden, Sedley, and the Captain of the sunken *Star*, went aboard the *Mere Honour*, where he was shortly joined by Baptist Manwood from the *Marigold*, with his lieutenants Wynch and Paget. In his state-cabins, when he had given his Captains welcome, the Admiral sat at table with his wine before him and heard how had fared the *Cygnet* and the *Marigold*, then listened to Baldry's curt recital of the *Star's* ill destinies. The story ended, he gave his meed of grave sympathy to the man whose whole estate had been that sunken ship. Baldry sat silent, fingering, as was his continual trick, the hilt of his great Andrew Ferrara. But when the Admiral, with his slow, deliberate courtesy, went on to propose that for this adventure Captain Baldry cast his lot with the *Mere Honour*, he listened, then gave unexpected check.

"I' faith, his berth upon the *Cygnet* liked him well enough, and though he thanked the Admiral, what reason for changing it? In fine, he should not budge, unless, indeed, Sir Mortimer Ferne——" He turned himself squarely so as to face the Captain of the *Cygnet*.

The latter, in the instant that passed before

he made any answer to Baldry's challenging look, saw once again that vision of the other morning—the flare of dawn, and high against it one desperate figure, a man just balancing if to keep his life or no, seeing that for the thing he loved there was no rescue. Say that the doomed ship had been the *Cygnet* —would Mortimer Ferne have so cheapened grief, have grown so bitter, be so ready to eat his heart out with envy and despite? Perhaps not, and yet, who knew? The *Cygnet* was there, visible through the port windows, lifting against serenest skies her proud bulk, her castellated poop and forecastle, her tall masts and streaming pennants. The *Star* was down below, a hundred leagues from any lover, and the sea was deep upon her, and her guns were silent and her decks untrodden. . . . He was wearied of Baldry's company, impatient of his mad temper and peasant breeding, very sure that he chose, open-eyed, to torment himself from Teneriffe to America with the sight of a prospering foe merely that that foe might feel a nettle in his unwilling grasp. Yet, so challenged, when had passed that moment, he met Baldry's gloomy eyes, and again assured the adventurer that the presence of so brave a

man and redoubted fighter could but do honour to the *Cygnet*.

His words were all that courtesy could desire: if tone and manner were of the coldest, yet Baldry, not being sensitive, and having gained his point, could afford to let that pass. He turned to the Admiral with a short laugh.

"You see, sir, we are yoke-brothers—Sir Mortimer Ferne and I — though whether God or the devil hath joined us! . . . Well, the two of us may send some Spanish souls to hell!"

With his yoke-brother, Arden, and Sedley he returned to the *Cygnet*, and that evening at supper, having drunken much sack, began to loudly vaunt the deeds of the drowned *Star*, magnifying her into a being sentient and heroical, and darkly wishing that the luck of the expedition be not gone with her to the bottom of the sea.

"Luck!" exclaimed Ferne at last, haughtily. "I hate the word. Your luck —my luck—the luck of this our enterprise! It is a craven word, overmuch upon the lips of Christian gentlemen."

"I was not born a gentleman," said Baldry, playing with his knife. "You know that, Sir Mortimer Ferne."

"I'll swear you've taken out no patent since," muttered Arden, whereat his neighbour laughed aloud, and Baldry, pushing back his stool, glared at each in turn.

"I know that a man's will, and not a college of heralds, makes him what he is," said Ferne. "I have known churls in honourable houses and true knights in the common camp. And I submit not my destinies to that gamester Luck: as I deserve and as God wills, so run my race!"

"Oh, every man of us knows our Captain's deserving!" quoth Baldry. "Well, gentlemen, on that occasion of which I was speaking, the devil's own luck being with me, I sunk both the carrack and the galley, and headed the *Star* for the castle of Paria——"

On went the wondrous tale, with no further interruption from Sir Mortimer, who sat at the head of the table, playing the part of host to Captain Robert Baldry, listening with cold patience to the adventurer's rhodomontade. When spurred by wine there was wont to awaken in Baldry a certain mordant humour, a rough wit, making straight for the mark and clanging harshly against an adversary's shield, a lurid fancy dully illuminating the subject he had in

hand. The wild story that he was telling caught the attention of the more thoughtless sort at table ; they leaned forward, encouraging him from flight to flight, laughing at each sally of boatswain's wit, ejaculating admiration when the *Star* and her Captain fairly left the realm of the natural. One splendid lie followed another until Baldry was caught by his own words, and saw himself thus, and thus, and thus !—a sea-god confessed, a gatherer of riches, a dealer of death from the poop of the *Star* ! In his mind's eye the lost bark swelled to a phantom ship, gigantic, terrible, wrapped with the mist of the sea ; while he himself—ah ! he himself—

> "He struck the mainmast with his hand,
> The foremast with his knee"—

All that he had been and all that he had done, if man were only something more than man, if devil's luck and devil's power would come to his whistle, if the seed of his nature could defy the iron stricture of the flesh, reaching its height, shooting up into a terrible upas-tree—so for the moment Baldry saw himself. Into his voice came a deep and sonorous note, his black eyes glowed ; he began to gesture with his hand, stately as a Spaniard. And then, chancing to glance

toward the head of the board, he met the eyes of the man who sat there, his Captain now, whom he must follow! What might he read in their depths? Half-scornful amusement, perhaps, and the contempt of the man who has done what man may do for the yoke-fellow who habitually made claim to supernatural prowess; in addition, the scholar's condemnation of blatant ignorance, the courtier's dislike of unmannerliness, the soldier's scorn of unproved deeds, athwart all the philosophic smile! Baldry, flushing darkly, hated with all his wild might, for that he chose to hate, the man who sat so quietly there, who held with so much ease the knowledge that by right of much beside his commission he was leader of every man within those floating walls. The Captain of the *Star* struck the table with his hand.

"Ah, I had good help that time! My brother sailed with me—Thomas Baldry, that was master of the *Speedwell* that went down at Fayal in the Azores. . . . Didst ever see a ghost, Sir Mortimer Ferne?"

"No," answered Ferne, curtly.

"Then the dead come not to haunt us," said Baldry. "I would have sworn a many had passed before your eyes. Now had I

been Thomas Baldry I would have won back."

"That also?" demanded Sir Mortimer. His tone was of simple wonder, and there went round the board a laugh for Baldry's boasting. That adventurer started to his feet, his eyes, that were black, deep-set, and very bright, fixed upon Ferne.

"That also," he answered. "An I should die before our swords cross, that also!"

He turned and left the cabin.

"Now," said Arden, as his heavy footsteps died away, "I had rather gather snow for the Grand Turk than rubies with some I wot of!"

Henry Sedley, a hot red in his cheek, and his dark hair thrown back, turned from staring after the retreating figure. "If I send him my cartel, Sir Mortimer, wilt put me in irons?"

"Ay, that will I," said Ferne, calmly. "Word and deed he but doth after his kind. Well, let him go. For his words, that a man's deeds do haunt him, rising like shadows across his path, I believe full well—but for me the master of the *Speedwell* makes no stirring. . . . Take thy lute, Henry Sedley, and sing to us, giving honey

after gall! Sing to me of other things than war."

As he spoke he moved to the stern windows, took his seat upon the bench beneath, and leaning on his arm, looked out upon the low red sun and the darkening ocean.

"Ring out your bells, let mourning shows be spread
For love is dead:
Love is dead, infected
With plague of deep disdain"—

sang Sedley with throbbing sweetness, depth of melancholy passion. The listener's spirit left its chafing, left pride and disdain, and drifted on that melodious tide to far heavens.

"Weep, neighbours, weep; do you not hear it said
That Love is dead?
His death-bed peacock's folly;
His winding-sheet is shame;
His will false-seeming wholly;
His sole executor blame!"

rang Sedley's splendid voice. The song ended; the sun sank; on came the invader night. Ferne took the lute and slowly swept its strings.

"How much, how little of it all is peacock's folly," he said; "who knoweth? Life and Living, Love and Hate, and Honour the bubble, and Shame the Nessus-robe, and Death,

which, when all's done, may have no answer to the riddle! Where is the fixed star, and who knoweth depth from shallow, or himself, or anything?" He struck the lute again, drawing from it a lingering and mournful note.

"Now out upon the man who brought melancholy into fashion!" ejaculated Arden. "In danger the blithest soul alive, when all is well you do ask yourself too many questions! I'll go companion with Robert Baldry, who keeps no fashions save of Mars' devising."

"Why, I am not sad," said Ferne, rousing himself. "Come, I'll dice with thee for fifty ducats and a gold jewel—to be paid from the first ship we take!"

On sailed the ships through tranquil seas, until many days had fallen into their wake, slipping by them like painted clouds of floating seaweed or silver-finned vagrants of the deep. Great calms brooded upon the water, and the sails fell idle, flag and pennant drooped; then the trade-wind blew, and the white ships drove on. They drove into the blue distance, towards unknown ports—known only in that they would surely prove themselves Ports of All Peril. At night the

sea burned; a field of gold it ran to horizons jewelled with richer stars than shone at home. Above them, in the vault of heaven, hung the Great Ship, blazed the Southern Cross. Every hour saw the flight of meteors, and their trains, golden argosies of the sky, faded slowly from the dark-blue depths. When the moon arose she was ringed with colours, but the men who gazed upon her said not, "Every hue of the rainbow is there." They said, "See the red gold, the pearls and the emeralds!" The night died suddenly and the day was upon them, an aureate god, lavish of splendour. They hailed him with music; as they pulled and hauled, the seamen sang. Other winds than those of heaven drove them on. High purpose, love of country, religious ecstasy, chivalrous devotion, greed of gain, lust of aggrandizement, lust of power, mad ambitions, ruthless intents—by how strong a current, here crystal clear, there thick and defiled, were they swept towards their appointed haven! In cruelty and lust, in the faith of little children and the courage of old demigods, they went like homing pigeons; and not a soul, from him who gave command to him who, far aloft, looked out upon the deep, recked or cared

that another age would call him pirate or corsair, raising brow and shoulder over the morality of his deeds.

In the realms which they were entering, Truth, shattered into a thousand gleaming fragments, might be held in part, but never wholly. There man's quarry was the false Florimel, and she lured him on and he saw with magically anointed eyes. Too suddenly awakened, the imagination of the time was reeling; its sap ran too fast; wonders of the outer, revelations of the inner, universe crowded too swiftly; the heady wine made now gods, now fools of men. The white light was not for the heirs of that age, nor yet the golden mean. Wonders happened, that they knew, and so like children they looked for strange chances. There was no miracle at which their faith would balk, no illusion whose cobweb tissue they cared to tear away. Give but a grain whereon to build, a phenomenon before which started back, amazed and daunted, the knowledge of the age, and forthwith a mighty imagination leaped upon it, claimed it for its own. There had been but a grain of sand, an inexplicable fact—lo! now, a rounded pearl shot with all the hues of the morning, a miracle of grace or an

evidence of diabolic power, to doubt which was heresy!

Adventurers to the Spanish Main believed in devil-haunted seas, in flying islands, in a nation of men whose eyes were set in their shoulders, and of women who cut off the right breast and slew every male child. They believed in a hidden city, from end to end a three days' march, where gold-dust thickened the air, and an Inca drank with his nobles in a garden whose plants waved not in the wind, whose flowers drooped not, whose birds never stirred upon the bough, for all alike were made of gold. They believed in a fair fountain, hard indeed to find, but of such efficacy that the greybeard who dipped in its shining waters stepped forth a youth upon ever vernal banks.

So with these who like an arrow now clave the blue to the point of danger. In this strange half of the world, where nature's juggling hand dealt now in supernal beauty, now in horror without a name, how might they, puppets of their age, hold an even balance, know the mirage, know the truth? Inextricably mingled were the threads of their own being, and none could tell warp from woof, or guess the pattern that was

weaving or stay the flying shuttle. What if upon the material scroll unrolling before them God had chosen to write strange characters? Was not the parchment His, and how might man question that moving finger?

One day they discerned an island, fair and clear against the horizon—undoubtedly there, although no chart made mention of it. All saw the island; but when one man cried out at the amazing height of its snowy peak another laughed him to scorn, declaring the peak a cloud, and spoke of sand-dunes topped with low bushes. A third clamoured of a fair white city, an evident harbour, and the masts of great ships; a fourth, every whit as positive, stood out for unbroken forests and surf upon a lonely reef. While they contended, the island vanished. Then they knew that they had seen Saint Brandon's Isle, and in his prayer at the setting of the watch the chaplain made mention of the matter. On a night when all the sea was phosphorescent, Thynne the master saw in the wake of the *Cygnet* a horned spirit, very black and ugly, leaping from one fiery ripple to another, but when he called on Christ's name, rushing madly away, full

tilt into the setting moon. Again, Ferne and young Sedley, pacing the poop beneath a sky of starry splendour, and falling silent after talk that had travelled from Petrarch and Ariosto to that *Faerie Queene* which Edmund Spenser was writing, heard a faint sweet singing far across the deep. "Hark!" breathed Sedley. "The strange sweet sound . . . surely mermaiden singing!"

"I know not," replied Ferne, his hands upon the railing. "Perchance 'tis so. They say there are fair women. . . . The sound is gone. I would I might hear thy sister singing."

"How silver and how solemn is the sky!" said his companion. "Perhaps it was the echo of some heavenly strain. There goeth a great star! They say that the fall of such stars is portentous, speaking to men of doom."

His Captain laughed. "Hast added so much astrology to thy store of learning? Now, goodwife Atropos may cut her thread by the light of a comet; but when the comet has flared away and the shearer returned to her shearing, then in the deep darkness, where even the stars shine not, the shorn thread may feel God's touch, may know

it hath yet its uses.... How all the sea grows phosphorescent! and the stars do fall so thickly that there may be men a-dying. Well, before long there will be other giving of swords to Death!"

In the silence which followed his words, lightly spoken as they were, young Sedley, who indeed owed very much to Mortimer Ferne, laid impulsively his hand upon his Captain's hand. "On the night you give your sword to Death, how great a star shall fall! An I go first, I shall know when the trumpet sounds for your coming."

"When I give my sword to Death," said Ferne, absently. "Ay, lad, when I give my sword to Death.... There again, do you hear the singing? It is the wind, I think, and not the people of the sea. It hath a mocking sound.... When I give my sword to Death."

From the tops above them fell a voice of Stentor. "Sail ho! sail ho!" Upon which they gave for the remainder of the tropic night small attention to aught but warlike matters. With the morning the three ships counted to the general gain the downright sinking of a small fleet from Hispaniola, and the taking therefrom porcelain,

many bales of rich silk and rosaries of gold beads, a balass-ruby, twenty wedges of silver, and a chest well lined with ducats.

With this treasure to hark them forward, on and on sailed the ships; and now land birds came to them, and now they passed, floating upon the water, the leafy branch of a strange tree with red, cuplike blossoms. Full-sailed upon the quiet sea they held their course, while the men upon them, eager-eyed and keen, watched for land and for the galleons of Spain. Content with the taking of the *Star*, calamity now kept away from the ships. None upon them died, few were sick, masters and captains were kind, mariners and landsmen trusted in their tried might and wealthy promises, and all the gales of heaven prospered the voyage.

On the last day of July, seven weeks from that leave-taking in the tavern of the *Triple Tun*, they came to the rocky island of Tobago; watered there; then, driven by the constant wind, went on until faint upon the horizon rose the coast of the mainland.

The mountains of Maccanoa in the island of Margarita loomed before them; they passed Coche, and on a night when light clouds obscured the moon approached the

pearl islet of Cubagua. With the dawn the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold* entered the harbour of New Cadiz, and began to bombard that much-decayed town of the pearl-fishers. The *Cygnet* kept on to the slight settlement of La Rancheria, and met, emerging in hot haste from a little bay of blue crystal, the galleon *San José*, one thousand tons, commanded by Antonio de Castro, very richly laden, sailing from Puerto Bello to Santo Domingo, and carrying, moreover, a company of soldiers from Nueva Cordoba on the mainland to Pampatar in Margarita.

CHAPTER IV

MYRIADS of sea-birds, frightened by the thunder of the guns, fled screaming; the palm-fringed shores of the bay showed through the smoke brown and dim and far removed; hot indeed was the tropic morning in the core of that murk and flame and ear-splitting sound. Each of the combatants carried three tiers of ordnance; in each the guns were served by masters at their trade. Canons and culverins, sakers and falcons, rent the air; then the *Cygnet*, having the wind of the Spaniard, laid her aboard, and the harquebusiers, caliver, and crossbow-men also began to speak. Together with the great guns they spoke to such effect that the fight became very deadly. Twice the English strove to enter the huge *San José*, and twice the Spaniards, thick upon her as swarming bees, beat them back with sword and pike and blinding volleys from their musketeers. From the tops fell upon them

stones and heated pitch ; the hail-shot mowed them down ; swordsmen and halberdiers thrust many from their footing, loosening for evermore their clutching fingers, for ever stayed the hoarse shout in their throats. Many fell into the sea and were drowned before the soul could escape through gaping wounds ; others reached their own decks to die there, or to lie writhing at the feet of the unhurt, who might not stay for the need of any comrade. At the second repulse there arose from the galleon a deafening cry of triumph.

Ferne, erect against the break of the *Cygnet's* poop, drawing a cloth tight with teeth and hand above a wound in his arm from which the blood was streaming, smiled at the sound, knotted his tourniquet ; then for the third time sprang upon that slanting, deadly bridge of straining ropes. His sword flashed above his head.

" Follow me—follow me ! " he cried, and his face, turned over his shoulder, looked upon his men. A drifting smoke wreath obscured his form ; then it passed, and he stood in the galleon's storm of shot, poised above them, a single figure breathing war. Seen through the glare, the face was serene ;

only the eyes commanded and compelled. The voice rang like a trumpet. "Saint George and Merry England! Come on, men!—come on, come on!"

They poured over the side and across the chasm dividing them from their foes. A resistless force they came, following the gleam of a lifted sword, the "On—on!" of a loved leader's voice. Sir Mortimer touched the galleon's side, ran through the body of a man of Seville whose sword point offered at his throat, and stood the next moment upon the poop of the *San José*. Robert Baldry, a cutlass between his teeth, sprang after him; then came Sedley and Arden and the tide of the English

The Spanish captain met his death, as was fitting, at Ferne's hand; the commandant of the soldiers fell to the share of Henry Sedley. The young man fought with dilated eyes, and white lips pressed together. Sir Mortimer, who fought with narrowed eyes, who, quite ungarrulous by nature, yet ever talkative in such an hour as this, found time to note his lieutenant's deeds, to throw to the brother of the woman he loved a "Well done, dear lad!" Sedley held his head high; his leader's praise wrought in him like wine.

He had never seen a man who did not his best beneath the eyes of Sir Mortimer Ferne. . . . There, above the opposite angle of the poop, red gold, now seen but dimly through the reek of the guns, now in a moment of clear sunshine flaunting it undefiled, streamed the Spanish flag. Between him and that emblem of world-power the press was thick, for around it at bay were gathered many valiant men of Spain, fighting for their own. They who by the law of the strong were to inherit from them had yet to break that phalanx. Sedley threw himself forward, beat down a veteran of the Indies, swept on towards the goal of that hated banner. His enemies withstood him, closed around him; in a moment he was cut off from the English, was gazing into death's eyes. With desperate courage he strove to thrust aside the spectre, but it came nearer—and nearer—and nearer. The blood from a cut across his temple was blinding him. He dashed it from him, and then—that was not Death's face, but his Captain's. . . . Death slunk away.

Ferne, whose dagger had made that rescue, whose sword was rapidly achieving for the two of them a wizard's circle, chided and laughed as he fought—

"What, lad! wouldst have played Samson among the Philistines? A man should better know his strength—There, señor! a St. George for your San Jago!—Well done again, Henry Sedley! but I must show you a better *passado*.—Have at *thee*, Don Inches!—Ah, Captain Baldry, Giles Arden, good Humphrey, give you welcome! Here's room for Englishmen.—Well, die, then, pertinacious señor!—Now then, Henry Sedley, there are lions yet in your path, but not so many. Have at their golden banner an you prize the toy! No, Arden, no—let him take it single-handed. Our first battle is far behind us. . . . Now who leads here, since I think that he who did command is dead? Is it you, señor?"

The poop was a shambles, the *San José* from stem to stern in sorry case. Underfoot lay the dead and wounded, her guns were silenced, her men-at-arms overmastered. They had fought with desperate bravery, but the third attack of the English had been elemental in its force. A rushing wave, a devastating flame, they had swept the ship, and defeat was the portion of their foes. Waist and forecastle were won, but upon the poop a remnant yet struggled, though in weakness and despair. It was to one of this

band that the captain of the *Cygnet* addressed his latest words. Even as he spoke he parried the other's thrust, and felt that it had been given but half-heartedly. He had used the Spanish tongue, but when an answer came from the mailed figure before him it was couched in English.

"Not so, valiant sir," it said: and there was in the voice some haste and eagerness. "Say rather I am led. Alas! when a man fights with his sword alone, his will being traitor to his hand!"

"Since it is with the sword alone you fight, Spaniard with an English tongue," replied his antagonist, "I do advise you to go seek your sword, seeing that without it you are naught." As he spoke he sent the other's weapon hurtling into the sea.

Its owner made a gesture of acquiescence. "I surrender," he said; then in an undertone: "He yonder with the plume, now that De Castro lies dead, is your fittest quarry. Drag him down and the herd is yours."

Ferne stared, then curled his lip. "Gramercy for your hint," he said. "I pray you that henceforth we become the best of strangers."

A shout arose, and Sedley bore down upon

them, his right arm high, crumpled in his hand the folds, tarnished with smoke, riddled by shot, of the great ensign. It was the beginning of the end. Half an hour later the red cross of St. George usurped the place of the golden flag. That same afternoon the *Cygnet* and *San José*—the latter now manned by an English crew, with her former masters under hatches—appeared before La Rancheria, stormed the little settlement, and found there a slight treasure of pearls. More than this was accomplished, for, boat-load after boat-load, the Spanish survivors of the fight were transferred from the galleon to a strip of lonely shore, and there left to shift for themselves. One only of all that force the Captain of the *Cygnet* detained, and that was the man who had used the tongue of England and the sword of Spain. With the sunset the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold*, having left desolation behind them at New Cadiz, joined the *Cygnet* and her prize where they lay at anchor between the two spits of sand that formed the harbour of La Rancheria.

In the *Mere Honour's* state-cabin the Admiral of the expedition formally embraced and thanked his captain whose service to

the common cause had been so great. It was, indeed, of magnitude. Not many hours had passed between the frenzy of battle and this sunshiny morning; but time had been made and strength had been found to look to the cargo of the *San José*. If wealth be good, it was worth the looking to, for not the *Cacafuego* had a richer lading. Gold and silver, ingots and bars and wrought images, they found, and a great store of precious stones. To cap all fortune, there was the galleon's self, a great ship, seaworthy yet, despite the wounds of yesterday, mounting many guns, well supplied with powder, ammunition, and military stores, English now in heart, and lacking nothing but an English name. This they gave her that same day. In the smoke and thunder of every cannon royal within the fleet *San José* vanished, and in its place arose the *Phœnix*.

Exultant, flushed, many of them bearing wounds, the officers of the expedition and the gentlemen adventurers who had staked with them crowded the cabin of the *Mere Honour*. The sunshine streaming through the windows showed in high light bandaged heads or arms and faces haggard with victory. Wine had been spilled, and in the air there

was yet the savour of blood. About each man just breathed some taint of the savagery that was not yet beaten back after yesterday's wild outburst and breaking of the bars. In some it took the form of the sleek stillness of the tiger ; others were loud-voiced, restless, biting at their nails. Only to a few was it given to bear triumph soberly, with room for other thoughts ; to the most it came as a tumultuous passion, an irrational joy, a dazzling bandage to their eyes, beneath which they saw, with an inner vision, wealth a growing snowball and victory their familiar spirit. Among the adventurers from the *Cygnet* there was, moreover, an intoxication of feeling for the man who had led them in that desperate battle, whose subtle gift it was to strike fire from every soul whose circle touched his own. He was to them among ten thousand the captain of their choice, not loved the least because of that quality in him which gave ever just the praise which bred strong longing for desert of fame. Now he stood beside the Admiral, and spoke with ardour of the Englishmen who had won that fight, and very tenderly of the dead. They were not a few, for the battle had been long and doubtful. Simply

and nobly he spoke, giving praise to thirsty souls. When he had made an end, there was first a silence more eloquent than speech pregnant with the joy a man may take in his deed when he looks upon it and sees that it is good ; then a wild cheer, thrice repeated, for Sir Mortimer Ferne. The name went out of the windows over the sea, and up to every man who sailed the ship. One moment Ferne stood, tasting his reward ; then, " Silence, friends ! " he said. " To God the victory ! And I hear naught of New Cadiz and other fortunate ships." He drew swiftly from its sling his wounded arm and waved it above his head. " The Admiral ! " he cried, and then, " *The Marigold !* "

When at last there was quiet in the cabin, Nevil, a man of Humphrey Gilbert's type, too lofty of mind to care who did the service so that the service was done, began to speak of the captured galleon. " A noble ship— the *Star* come again, glorious in her resurrection robes ! Who shall be her captain, teaching her to eschew old ways and serve the Queen ? " His eyes rested upon the galleon's conqueror. " Sir Mortimer Ferne, the election lies with you."

Ferne started sharply. " Sir, it is an

honour I do not desire! As Admiral, I pray you to name the captain of the *Phœnix*."

A breathless hush fell upon the cabin. It was a great thing to be captain of a great ship—so great a thing, so great a chance, that of the adventurers who had bravely fought on yesterday more than one felt his cheek grow hot and the blood drum in his ears. Arden cared not for preferment, but Henry Sedley's eyes were very eager. Baldry having no hopes of favour, sat like a stone, his great frame rigid, his nails white upon the hilt of his sword, his lips white and sneering beneath his short, black, strongly curling beard.

The pause seemed of the longest; then, "Not so," said the Admiral quietly. "It is your right. We know that you will make no swerving from your duty to God, the Queen, and every soul that sails upon this adventure, which duty is to strengthen to the uttermost this new sinew of our enterprise. Mailed hand and velvet glove, you know their several uses, and the man whom you shall choose will be one to make the galleon's name resound."

Ferne signed to the steward, and when the tankard was filled, raised the sherris to his

lips. "I drink to Captain Robert Baldry, of the *Phœnix!*" he said, bowed slightly to the man of his nomination, then turned aside to where stood Henry Sedley.

Around the cabin ran a deep murmur of reluctant assent to the wisdom of the choice and of tribute to the man who had just heaped before his personal enemy the pure gold of opportunity. Few there were from whom Baldry had not won dislike, but fewer yet who knew him not for a captain famous for victory against odds, trained for long years in the school of these seas, at once desperate and wary, a man of men for adventure such as theirs. He had made known far and wide the name of that his ship which the sea took, and for the *Phœnix* he well might win a yet greater renown.

Now the red blood flooded his face, and he started up, speaking thickly. "You are Admiral of us all, Sir John Nevil! I do understand that it is yours to make disposition in a matter such as this. I take no favour from the hand of Sir Mortimer Ferne!"

"I give you none," said Ferne coldly. "Favours I keep for friendship, but I deny not justice to my foe."

The Admiral's grave tones prevented Bal-

dry's answer. "Do you appeal to me as Admiral? Then I also adjudge you the command of the galleon. The *Star* did very valiantly; look to it that the *Phœnix* prove no laggard."

"Hear me swear that I will make her more famous than is Drake's *Golden Hind!*" cried Baldry, his exultation breaking bounds, "Sir John, you have knowledge of men, and I thank you! Sir Mortimer Ferne, I will give account——"

"Not to me, sir," interrupted Ferne, haughtily. "I have but one account with you, and that my sword shall hereafter audit."

"Sir, I am content!" cried the other fiercely, then turning again to the Admiral, broke into a laugh that was impish in its glee. "Ah, I've needed to feel my hand on my ship's helm! Sir John, shall I have my sixty tall fellows again, with just a small levy from the *Mere Honour*, the *Marigold*, and the *Cygnet?*"

"Yes," answered the Admiral, and presently, by his rising, declared the council ended, whereupon the adventurers dispersed to their several ships where they lay at anchor in the crystal harbour, the watchmen

in the tops straining eyes, on the decks mariners and soldiers as jubilant as were ever men who did battle on the seas. Only the *Cygnet's* boat, rocking beneath the stern of the *Mere Honour*, waited for its captain, who tarried with the Admiral.

In the state-cabin the two men sat for some moments in silence, the Admiral covering with his hand his bearded lips, Ferne with head thrown back against the wall and half-closed eyes. In the strong light with which the cabin was flooded his countenance now showed of a somewhat worn and haggard beauty. Drunken and forgotten was the wine of battle, gone the lofty and impassioned vein ; after the exaltation came the melancholy fit, and the man who, mailed in activities, was yet, beneath that armour, a dreamer and a guesser of old riddles, had let the fire burn low, and was gone down into the shadowy places.

" Mortimer," spoke the Admiral, and waited. The other moved, drew a long breath, and then with a short laugh came back to the present.

" My friend . . . How iron is our destiny ! Do I hate that man too greatly ? One might say, I think, that I loved him well,

seeing that I have lent my shoulder for him to climb upon."

"Mortimer, Mortimer," said Nevil, "you know that I love you. My friend, I pray you to somewhat beware yourself. I think there is in your veins a subtle poison may work you harm."

Ferne looked steadfastly upon him. "What is its name?"

The other shook his head. "I know not. It is subtle. Perhaps it is pride—ambition too inwrought with fairest qualities to show as such—security too absolute of yourself of selves. Perhaps I mistake, and your blood doth run as healthfully as a child's. But you are of those who ever breed in other's speculation, wilding fancies. . . . When a man doth all things too well, what is there left for God to do but to break and crumble and remould? If I do you wrong, blame, if you will, my love, which is jealous for you—friend whom I value, soldier and knight whom I have ever thought the fair ensample of our time!"

"I hold many men, known and unknown, within myself," said Ferne, slowly. "I think it is always so with those of my temper. But over that hundred I am centurion."

"God forgive me if I misjudge one of their number," answered the other. "The centurion I have never doubted nor will doubt."

Another silence; then, "Will you see that Spaniolated Englishman, my prisoner?" asked Sir Mortimer. "He is under charge without."

The Admiral put to his lips a golden whistle, and presently there stood in the cabin a slight man of not unpleasing countenance—blue eyes, brown hair, unfurrowed brow, and beneath a scant and silky beard a chin as softly rounded as a woman's. His name and estate? Francis Sark, gentleman. English? So born and bred, cousin and sometime servant to my lord of Shrewsbury. And what did my English gentleman, my cousin to an English nobleman, upon the galleon *San José?*—Alack, sirs! were Englishmen upon Spanish ships so unknown a spectacle?

"I have found them," quoth the Admiral "rowing in Spanish galleys, naked, scarred chained, captives and martyrs."

Said Ferne, "You, sir, fought in Milan mail, standing beside the captain of soldiers from Nueva Cordoba."

"And if I did," answered boldly their prisoner, "none the less was I slave and captive, constrained to serve detested masters. Where needs must I fight, I fought to the purpose. Doth not the galley-slave pull strongly at the oar, though the chase be English and of his own blood?"

"He toils under the whip," said Ferne. "Now what whip did the Spaniard use?"

"He is dead, and his men await succour on that lonely coast where you left them," was Master Francis Sark's somewhat singular reply. "There is left in the fortress of Nueva Cordoba a single company of soldiers; the battery at the river's mouth hath another. Luiz de Guardiola commands the citadel, and he is a strong man, but Pedro Mexia at the Bocca is so easy-going that his sentinels nod their nights away. In the port ride two caravels—eighty tons, no more—and their greatest gun a demi-cannon. The town is a cowardly place of priests, women, and rich men, but it holds every peso of this year's treasure gathered against the coming of the plate-fleet. There is much silver with pearls from Margarita and crescents of gold from Guiana, and it all lies in a house of white stone on the north side of the square. May-

hap De Guardiola up in the fortress watches, but all else, from Mexia to the last muleteer, think themselves as safe as in the lap of the Blessed Virgin. The plate-fleet stays at Cartagena, because of the illness of its Admiral, Don Juan de Maeday Espinosa. . . . I show you, sirs, a bird's nest worth the robbing."

"You are a galley-slave the most circumstantial I have ever met," said Ferne. "If there are nets about this tree, I will wring your neck for the false songster that you are."

"You shall go with us bird's-nesting," said the Admiral.

"That falls in with my humour," Master Sark made answer. "For, look you, there are such things as a heavy score and an ancient grudge, to say nothing of true service to a true Queen."

"Then," quoth the other, "you shall feed fat your grudge. But if what you have told me is a leasing and not truth, I will hang you from the yard-arm of my ship!"

"It is God's truth," swore the other.

Thus it was that, having, like all English adventurers upon Spanish seas, to trust to strange guides, the *Mere Honour*, the *Cygnet*, the *Marigold*, and the *Phœnix* shaped their

course for the mainland and Nueva Cordoba, where were bars of silver, pearls and gold crescents, and up in the castle that fierce hawk De Guardiola, who cared little for the town that was young and weak, but much for gold, the fortress, and his own grim will and pleasure.

CHAPTER V

LUIZ DE GUARDIOLA, magnificent Castilian, proud as Lucifer, still as the water above the reef offshore, and cruel as the black fangs beneath that serenity, looked over the wall of the fortress of Nueva Cordoba. He looked down into the moat well stocked with crocodiles, great fish his mercenaries, paid with flesh, and he looked at the tunal which ringed the moat as the moat ringed the squat white fortress. A deadly girdle was the tunal, of cactus and other thorny things, thick, wide, dark, and impenetrable, a forest of stilettoes, and for its kings the rattlesnake and viper. Nor naked Indian nor mailed white man might traverse that thicket where wall on wall was met a spiked and iron growth. One opening there was, through which ran the road to the town, but a battery deemed impregnable commanded this approach, forming an effectual clasp for that strong cestus which the fecund, supple, and heated land made possible to all Spanish

fortifications. Beyond the tunal the naked hillside fell steeply to a narrow plain, all patched with golden flowers, and from this yellow carpet writhed tall cacti, fantastic as trees seen in a dream. Upon the plain, pearl pink in the sunset light, huddled the town. Palm-trees and tamarinds overhung it; palm-trees, mimosas, and mangroves marked the course of a limpid river. Above the battery at the river's mouth drooped a red cross in a white field. Caravels there were none in the road, but riding there, close inshore, the four ships that had sunk the caravels and silenced the battery.

High in the air of evening, blown from the town, a trumpet sounded. De Guardiola ground his teeth, for that jubilant silver calling was not for San Jago, but Saint George. The notes gathered every memory of the past few days and pressed them upon him in one cup of chagrin. The caravels were gone, the battery at the Bocca gone, the town surrendered to these English dogs who now daily bared their teeth to the fortress itself. De Guardiola admitted the menace, knew from experience in the Low Countries that this breed of the North sprang strongly, held firmly. "Hounds of hell!" he mut-

tered. "Where is the fleet from Cartagena?"

The tropic ocean answered not, and the words of the wind were unintelligible. The sun dropped lower; the plain appeared to move, to roll and welter in the heated air and yellow light. Tall starvelings, the cacti spread their arms; from a mimosa wood arose a cloud of vultures; it was the hour of the Angelus, but no bells rang in the churches of the town. The town sat in fear, shrinking into corners from its cup of trembling. "Ransom!" cried the English from their ships and from their quarters in the square. "Pay us ransom, or we burn and destroy!" "Mother of God!" wailed Nueva Cordoba. "Why ask but fifty thousand ducats? As easy to give you the revenue of all the Indies! Moreover, every peso is housed in the fortress. Day before yesterday we carried there—oh, señors, not our wealth, but our poverty!" Quoth the English: "What has gone up may come down," and sent messengers, both Spanish and English, to Don Luiz de Guardiola, Governor of Nueva Cordoba, who from his stronghold swore that he found himself willing to hang these pirates, but not to dispense to them the King of Spain his treasure. Ransom! What

word was that for the lips of Lutheran dogs!

A sea bird flew overhead with a wailing cry; down in the moat a crocodile raised his horrible, fanged snout, then sank beneath the still water. Don Luiz turned his blood-shot eyes upon the town in jeopardy and the bland and mocking ocean, so guileless of those longed-for sails. The four ships in the river's mouth!—silently he cursed their every mast and spar, the holds agape for Spanish treasure, the decks whereon he saw men moving, the flags and streaming pennants flaunting interrogation of Spain's boasted power. A cold fury mounted from Don Luiz's heart to his brain. Of late he had slept not at all, eaten little, drunken no great amount of wine. Like a shaken carpet the plain rose and fell; a mirage lifted the coasts of distant islands, piling them above the horizon into castles and fortifications baseless as a dream. The sun dipped; up from the east rushed the night. The tunal grew a dark smudge, drawn by a wizard forefinger around De Guardiola, his men-at-arms, the silver bars and the gold crescents from Guiana. Out swung the stars, blazing, mighty, with black spaces in between. Again

rang the trumpet, a high voice proclaiming eternal endeavour. The wind began to blow, and on the plain the cacti, gloomy and fantastic sentinels, moved their stiff bodies, waved their twisted arms in gestures of strangeness and horror. The Spaniard turned on his heel, went down to his men-at-arms where they kept watch and ward, and at midnight, riding like Death on a great pale steed, led a hundred horsemen out of the fortress through the tunal, and so down the hillside to the town.

The English sentries cried alarm. In the square a man with a knot of velvet in his helm swung himself into the saddle of a captured warhorse; waved aside the blue-jerkined boy at the rein, in a word or two cried over his shoulder managed to impart to those behind him sheer assurance of victory, and was off to greet Don Luiz. They met in the wide street leading from the square, De Guardiola with his hundred cavaliers and Mortimer Ferne with his chance medley of horse and foot. The hot night filled with noise, the scream of wounded steeds and the shouting of men. Lights flared in the windows and women wailed to all the saints. Stubbornly the English drove back the Spanish

foot by foot, the way they had come, down the street of heat and clamour. In the dark hour before the dawn De Guardiola sounded a retreat, rode with his defeated band up the pallid hillside, through the serpent-haunted tunal, over the dreadfully peopled moat into the court of the white stone fortress. There, grim and grey, with closed lips and glowing eyes, he for a moment sat his horse in the midst of his spent men, then heavily dismounted, and called to him Pedro Mexia, who, several days before, had abandoned the battery at the river's mouth, fleeing with the remnant of his company to the fortress. The two went together into the hall, and there, while his squire unarmed De Guardiola, the lesser man spoke fluently, consigning to all the torments of hell the strangers in Nueva Cordoba.

"Go to; you are drunken!" said De Guardiola coldly. "You speak what you cannot act."

"I have three houses in the town," swore the other. "A reasonable ransom——"

"There is no longer any question of ransom," answered Don Luiz. "Fellow" —to the armourer—"fetch me a surgeon."

Mexia sat upright, his eyes widening:

"No question of ransom! I thank the saints that I am no hidalgo! Now had simple Pedro Mexia been somewhat roughly handled, unhorsed mayhap, even the foot of an English heretic planted on his breast, I think that talk of the ransom of Nueva Cordoba would not have ceased. But Don Luiz de Guardiola!—quite another matter! Santa Teresa! if the town is burnt I will have payment for my three houses!" His superior snarled, then as the surgeon entered, made signs to the latter to uncover a bruised shoulder and side.

At sunrise a trumpet was blown without the tunal, and the English again made demand of ransom money. The fortress crouching upon the hilltop gave no answer, stayed silent as a sepulchre. Shortly afterwards from one quarter of the town arose together many columns of smoke; a little later an explosion shook the earth. The great magazine of Nueva Cordoba lay in ruins, while around it burned the houses fired by English torches. "Shall we destroy the whole of your city?" demanded the English. "Judge you if fifty thousand ducats will build it again!"

Nueva Cordoba, distracted, sent peti-

tioners to their Governor. "Pay these hell-hounds and pirates and let them sail away!" "Pay," advised also Pedro Mexia, "or presently they may have the fortress as well as the town! The squadron—it is yet at Cartagena! Easier to torment the caciques until more gold flows than to build another Nueva Cordoba. Scarpines and strappado won't lay stone on stone!"

Don Luiz kept long silence where he stood, a man of iron, cold as stone his long fingers pressed, venomous as any snake in the tunal, proud as a Spaniard may be, and like the rest of his world very mad for gold; but at last he turned, and despatching to the English camp a white flag, proposed by mouth of his herald a brief cessation of hostilities, and a meeting between himself, Don Luiz de Guardiola, Governor of Nueva Cordoba, and the valorous Señor John Nevil, commandant of Englishmen. Whereto in answer came, three-piled with courtesy, an invitation to Don Luiz de Guardiola and ten of his cavaliers to sup that evening in Nueva Cordoba with John Nevil and his officers. Truce should be proclaimed, safe-conduct given; for table-talk could be no better subject than the question of ransom.

Facing the square of Nueva Cordoba was a goodly house, built by the Church for the Church, but now sacrilegiously turned to other uses and become the quarters of Sir John Nevil and Sir Mortimer Ferne, who held the town and menaced the fortress, while Baptist Manwood and Robert Baldry kept the fleet and conquered battery. The place had a great arched refectory, and here the English prepared their banquet.

Indian friends by now had they, for in the town they had found and set at liberty three caciques, penned like beasts, chained with a single chain, scored with marks sickening to look upon. The caciques proved not ungrateful. Down the river this very day had come canoes rowed by men of bronze and filled with spoils of the chase, fish of strange shapes and brilliant hues, golden, luscious fruits, flowers, also fairer than amaranth or asphodel, gold beads and green stones. Gold and gems went into the treasure-chests aboard the ships, but all besides came kindly in for the furnishing of that rich feast. Nor were lacking other viands, for grain and flesh and wine had been abundant in Nueva Cordoba, whose storehouses now the English held. They hung their borrowed

banqueting-hall with garlands of flowers, upon the long table put great candles of virgin wax, with gold and silver drinking vessels, and brought to the revel of the night a somewhat towering, wild, and freakish humour. Victory unassuaged was theirs, and for them Fortune had cogged her dice. They had taken the *San José* and sunk the caravels, they had sacked the pearl-towns and Nueva Cordoba, they had gathered laurels for themselves and England. For the fortress, they deemed that they might yet drain it of hoarded treasure. The poison of the land and time had touched them. The wind sang to them of conquest ; morn and eve, the sun at noon, and at night the phosphorescent sea, were of the colour of gold, and the stars spoke of Fame. The great mountains also, to the south —how might the eye leap from height to height and the soul not stir ? In Time's hornbook ambition is an early lesson, and these scholars had conned it well. Of all that force, scarce one simple soldier or mariner in whom expectation ran not riot, while the gentlemen adventurers in whose company were to sup De Guardiola and his ten cavaliers saw that all things might be done with ease, and that evil chances lurked not for them.

The Captain of the *Cygnet* and the Captain of the *Phœnix*, with Arden and Sedley, awaited beside the great window of the hall their guests' appearance. The sunset was not yet, but the moment was at hand. The light, dwelling upon naked hillside and the fortress crowning it, made both to seem candescent, hill and castle one heart of flame against the purple mountains that stretched across the south. Very high were the mountains, very still and white that fortress flame; the yellow plain could not be seen, but the palm-trees were gold green above the walls of Nueva Cordoba. The light fell from the hilltop, a solitary trumpet blew, and forth from that guarded opening in the tunal rode De Guardiola on his pale horse, and at his back ten Spanish gentlemen.

"The dark line of them is like a serpent creeping from the tunal," said Henry Sedley. "Last night I dreamed a strange thing.... It concerned my sister Damaris. She came up from the sea, straight from the water like blown spray, and she was dressed in white. She looked down through the sea and her tears fell, and falling, they made music like the mermaiden's singing that we heard. '*Lie still,*' she said. '*Thou under the sea*

and I under the sod. Lie still : dream well : all's over.' To whom did she speak ?"

"If I were a dead man and she called my name, I would answer," said Ferne. "She under the sod and I under the sea. . . . So be it! But first one couch, one cup, one garland, the sounded depths of love——"

"I dreamed of home," quoth Baldry, "and of my mother's calling me, a little lad, when at twilight work was done. '*Robert, Robert!*' she called."

"I had no dreams," said Sir Mortimer. "Now sounds John Nevil's trumpets—our guests have made entry." . . . .

"Why, señors," answered Mexia, flattered and flown with wine, "I learned to speak your tongue from a man of your country, who also gave me that knowledge of English affairs which you are pleased to compliment. I make my boast that I am no traveller—I have not been home to Seville these twenty years—yet, as you see, I have some trifling acquaintance——"

"Your learning is of so shining a quality," quoth Sir Mortimer, with courteous emphasis, "that here and there a flaw cannot mar its curious worth. Smerwick Fort lies in Ire-

land, señor, not in England. Though verily the best thing I know of Edmund Campion is the courageousness of his end; yet indeed he died not with a halo about his head, nor were miracles wrought with his blood. Her Gracious Majesty the Queen of England hath no such distemperature as that you name, and keepeth no sort of familiar fiend. The Queen of Scots, if a most fair and most unfortunate, is yet a most wicked lady, who, alas! hath trained many a gallant man to a bloody and disastrous end."

"Who is that Englishman, your teacher?" came from the head of the board the Admiral's grave voice.

"He is dead," said De Guardiola at his right hand.

"Of his fate, valiant señors," began the fuddled Mexia, "you alone may be precisely aware——"

"He is dead," again stated with deliberation Don Luiz. "I know, señors, the pool where these fish were caught and the wood where alone grows this purple fruit. So you set at liberty those three slaves, the caciques? . . . Well, I had reason to believe that they had hidden gold."

"Where is Master Francis Sark?" de-

manded Nevil, of Ferne. "I did command his attendance here to-night."

"He plead a tertian fever—would not mar our warmth with his shivering," said the other. "I sent the chirurgeon to his cell—for indeed the man shook like a reed."

It would appear that Francis Sark was an unknown name to their guests, for no flicker of recognition passed over the countenance of any Spaniard. They sat at the long table, and foe drank to foe while fiddle and hautboy made music and the candles slowly wasted and in the hot night the garlands withered. Perfumes were lit in the room, and the smoke of their burning made a violet haze, through which quivered the heart-shaped candle flames. The music had a wild ring, and laughter as wild came easily to a man's lips. The English laughed for that their spirits were turned thistle-down, and the Spaniards laughed because a man's foe should not see his chagrin.

For a while compliment and courtesy led each party in chains; they masked distrust and hatred beneath cloth-of-gold ceremoniousness, punctiliously accepted a Roland for an Oliver, extravagantly praised the prowess of men and nations whom they much desired to sweep from the face of the earth. But as

time wore on and the wine went round, this cloak of punctilio began to grow threadbare and the steel beneath to gleam dangerously. There was thunder in the air, and men were ready to play at ball with the apples of Discord, though as yet they but tossed to each other the poisonous flowers which should grow that fruit. "How mightily on such a day did your little island!" cried the Spaniards. "Ah, señors, the invincibleness of your conquistadores!" ran the English testimony. "El Draco, Juan Acles, yourselves, valorous gentlemen, what daring past most pirates to sail the King of Spain his seas!" came the Spanish retort.

"The King of Spain his seas!" an Englishman echoed softly.

"Why, had you not heard?" said Arden. "God gave them to him on creation morning."

"Pirates! That is a prickly word!" swore Baldry.

"Why do you smile, señor?" demanded De Guardiola of the gentleman opposite him, this being Sir Mortimer Ferne.

"Did I smile, señor? I but chanced to think of a hound of mine who once was king of the pack, but now grows old." The English-

man shrugged. "True he thinks himself yet the fleetest and the strongest, but the younger dogs outstrip him. Presently they will snatch from him every bone."

"Now, by the Mother of God, I agree not with you!" said De Guardiola.

"Now, by the power of God, yet will it come to pass!" affirmed Sir Mortimer.

The Admiral, to whom Pedro Mexia, an easy man, was making voluble narration of the latest futile search for Manoa, turned his glance for a moment from that frank Spaniard. But Mortimer Ferne sat at ease, a smile upon his beautiful mouth, and his hand, palm uppermost, upon the board. Opposite him Don Luiz de Guardiola also smiled, and if that widening of the lips was somewhat tigerish, why, if all accounts were true, the man himself was one of that quality, as cruel, stealthy, and remorseless as any jaguar in those deep woods behind his castle. The Admiral returned to his discourse with Mexia, who might drop some useful hints as to the road to El Dorado.

"We have met before," said De Guardiola. "It was you who led your landing-party, capturing the battery."

"The fortune of war, señor! What says your proverb——"

"I gave ground, it is true. . . . There may come an hour when with a whip of iron I will drive you from Nueva Cordoba. Did you lead the attack upon the town?"

"Not so, señor. Sir John Nevil very valiantly held that honour, and to him Nueva Cordoba surrendered."

"Last night—when I thought to take you by surprise—were you the leader then?"

"Yes, señor."

"Wore you"—the Spaniard spoke slowly—"wore you black armour? Wore you in your helm a knot of rose-coloured velvet? . . . Ah, it was you unhorsed me, then!"

"Again, señor, the fortune of war."

A spasm distorted for the moment De Guardiola's every feature. So often of late had chagrin been pressed to his lips that the cup had grown poisonous. When he spoke it was with a hollow voice: "Had not Mexia come in between us! . . . The light caught the velvet knot upon your helm and it flamed like a star. I, Luiz de Guardiola, lying at your feet, looked up and saw it blaze above me like an evil star!" His hand fell heavily

upon the table. "The star may fall, Englishman!"

"The helm that bore the star may decline to earth," answered Ferne. "The star is fixed—beyond thy snatching, Spaniard!"

Thrust in Mexia, leaving El Dorado for the present less gilded plight of the Spanish: "Fifty thousand ducats! Holy Virgin! Are we Incas of Peru—Atahualpas who can fill a hall with gold? Now, twenty thousand——"

"I will not pay one peso," said De Guardiola. His voice, low and vibrant, was as a warder thrown down. On the instant, all the length of the table, the hurried speech, the growing excitement, the interchange of taunt and bravado, ceased, and men leaned forward, waiting. The silence was remarkable. Down in the square was heard the sentinel's tread; from a bough that drooped against the wall a globe of vegetable gold fell with the noise of stone-shot.

"Raze every house in Nueva Cordoba," went on the Spaniard, "play the earthquake and the wave—then sail away, sail away, marauders! and leave the fortress virgin, and the treasure no lighter by one piece, and Luiz de Guardiola to find a day when English dogs shall cringe before him!"

He had risen from his place, and at that movement sprang also to their feet his ten cavaliers. At once arose a tumult that might have resulted in the severance of the truce with sharp steel had not the leaders of the several parties stayed with lifted arm and stern command that threatened disgrace. At last was compelled a stillness sinister as that of the air before a storm.

"I bid our guests good-night," said the Admiral. "Our enemies we shall meet again. I think that so slight a ransom will not now content us. As you ride through the streets of Nueva Cordoba look your last, señors, upon her goodly houses and pleasant places."

"Do thy worst!" answered De Guardiola, grinning like a death's-head.

Mexia wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Let us go—let us go, Don Luiz! I stifle here. There's a strangeness in the air—my heart beats to bursting! Holy Teresa, give that the wine was not poisoned!"

Back to their fortress rode the Spaniards, up the bare, steep, pallid hillside, through the tunal, past their strong battery; back to the town rode the English, who with the punctilio of the occasion had accompanied their foes to the base of the hill. They rode through the

streets which that morning they had laid waste, and through those that the stern Admiral had sworn to destroy. There black ruin faced them starkly ; here doomed things awaited mutely. The town was little, and it seemed to cower before them like a child. Almost in silence did they ride, lifted and restless in mind, thought straining at the leash, but finding no words that should free it.

" How hot is the night ! " spoke Baldry at last. " Hast noticed the smell of the earth ? We killed a great serpent coming across the plain to-day."

" How the sea burns ! " said Henry Sedley. " There is a will-o'-the-wisp upon the marsh yonder."

" Here they call it the soul of the tyrant Aguirre," answered Ferne. " A lost soul."

A little longer and they parted for the night to meet early next morning in council with the Admiral. If to Nueva Cordoba, stripped and beaten, trembling beneath the fear of worse things to come, an army with banners held the land, so, in no lesser light, did the English see themselves, and they meant to have the treasure and to humble that white fortress. But it must be done quickly, quickly ! Pampatar in Margarita,

the castle of Paria or Berreo's settlement in Trinidad, could send no ships that might contend with the four swinging yonder in the river's mouth, but from the west at any hour, from La Guayra or Santa Marta, thunderbolts might fall. Would they indeed be wholly victors, then a general and overwhelming attack must soon be planned, soon made.

Weary enough from the day's work, yet, when he and his fellow adventurers had exchanged good-night, Mortimer Ferne went not to his quarters. Instead he passed through a dim corridor to the little cell-like room where was lodged Master Francis Sark, whom the English kept under surveillance, and who, under another name, had given to Pedro Mexia his knowledge of English speech and English history. What persuasion the Captain of the *Cygnet* used, what bribe or promise or threat, what confidence that there was more to tell thereby like a magnet compelling any wandering information, is not known ; nor is known what hatred of his conqueror, of a gallant form and a stainless name, may have uncoiled itself to poisonous ends in the soul of the small, smug, innocent-seeming man to whom he spoke ; but at the end

of a half-hour the Captain of the *Cygnet* left his prisoner of the *San José*, moved swiftly and lightly down the corridor to his own apartment, where he crossed to the window and stood there with his eyes upon the fortress of Nueva Cordoba, rising shadowy upon its shadowy hill. So often had he looked upon it that now, despite the night, he saw with precision the squat, white walls, the dark sweep of the encircling tunal, and, strong clasp for that thorny girdle, the too formidable battery defending the one apparent opening. "Another path!" he said to himself. "Masked and hidden, unguarded, known only to their leaders. . . . To come upon them from the rear while, catlike, they watch the highway yonder!" His breath came in a long sigh of satisfaction. "What if he lies? Why should he lie, seeing that he is in our power? But if he does . . ."

Minutes passed and yet he stood there, gazing with thoughtful eyes at hill and fortress rising above the silent town. Finally he went over to Robin-a-dale, asleep upon a pallet, and shaking him awake, bade the lad to follow him but make no noise. To the sentinels at the great door, in the square, at the edge of the town, he gave the word of the

night, and so issued with the boy from the huddle of flat-roofed houses, overhung by palm-trees, to the open plain.

Overhead innumerable stars, between heaven and earth incalculable swarms of luminous insects, from the soil a heavy exhalation as of musk, here arid places, there cacti like columns, like candelabra, like dark writhing fingers thrust from the teeming earth; Robin-a-dale liked not the place, wondered what dangerous errand his master was upon, but since he as greatly feared as greatly loved the man he served, cared not to ask. Presently Ferne turned, and a few moments found them climbing the long western slope of the hill, above them the dim outline of the fortress, the dark fringe of the tunal. Half-way up they came to a little rocky plateau, and here Ferne paused, hesitated a moment, then sat down upon a great stone and looked out to sea. He was waiting for the moon to rise, for with her white fingers she must point out that old way through the tunal of which Master Francis Sark had told him. Was it indeed there? The man, he thought, had all the marks of a liar. Again, why should he lie, being in their power?—unless treachery were so ingrained that it was

his natural speech. By all the tokens Sark had given, the opening should not be fifty yards away. When the moon rose he would see for himself. . . .

A pale radiance in the east proclaimed her approach. Since wait he must he waited patiently, and by degrees withdrew his mind from his errand and from strife and plotting. The boy crouched in silence beside him. There was air upon these heights, and the stir of it made Robin-a-dale to shiver. He gazed about him fearfully, for it was a dismal place. From behind those piled rocks, from the shadow of those strange trees, what things might creep or spring? Robin thought it time that the adventure were ended, and had he dared had said as much. Lights were burning upon the *Cygnet* where she rode in the pale river, near to the *Phœnix*, with the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold* just beyond, and there came over the boy a great home-sickness for her decks. He crept as closely as he might to her Captain, sitting there as quietly as if the teeming, musky soil were good Devon earth, and that phosphorescent ocean the grey waves of English seas, and he laid his hand upon Sir Mortimer's booted knee, and so was somewhat comforted.

Upon Ferne, waiting in inaction, looking out over the vast, dim panorama of earth and ocean, there fell, after the fever and exaltation, the stress and exertion of the past hours, a strange mood of quiet, of dreaming, and of peace. Sitting there in listless strength, he thought in quietude and tenderness of other things than gold, and fame, and the fortress which must be taken of Nueva Cordoba. With his eyes upon the gleaming sea he thought of Damaris Sedley, and of Sidney, and of a day at Windsor when the Queen had showed him much favour, and of a little windy knoll, near to his house of Ferne, where, returning from hunting or hawking, he was wont to check his horse that he might taste the sweet and sprightly air.

Now this man waited at the threshold of an opening door, and like a child his fancy gathered door-step flowers, recking nothing of the widening space behind, the beckoning hands, the strange chambers into which shortly he must go. Some faint and far monition, some breath of colder air may have touched him, for now, like a shriven man drowning into death, his mind dwelt lightly upon all things, gazed quietly upon a wide, retreating landscape, and saw that great and

small are one. He was wont to think of Damaris Sedley with ardour, imagining embraces, kisses, cries of love, sweet lips, warm arms; but to-night he seemed to see her in a glass somewhat dimly. She stood a little remote, quiet, sweet and holy, and his spirit chastened itself before her. Dear were his friends to him; his heart lodged them in spacious chambers and lapped them with observance; now he thought whimsically and lightly of his guests, as though their lodgings were far removed from that misty central hall where he himself abode. Loyal with the fantastic loyalty of an earlier time, practiser of chivalry and Honour's fanatic, for a moment those things also lost their saliency and edge. Word and deed of this life appeared of the silver and the moonlight, not of gold and sunlight; existence a dream and no matter of moment He plucked the flowers one by one, looked at them tranquilly, and laid them down, nor thought, This is Farewell.

Nueva Cordoba lay still amongst her rustling palms; the ocean rippled gold, and like gold-dust were the scintillating clouds of insects; the limpid river palely slid between its mangrove banks, a low wind sighed, a night-bird called; far, far

in the forest behind the hill a muffled roar proclaimed that the jaguar had found its meat. The moon rose—such a moon as never had England looked upon. Pearl, amethyst, and topaz were her rings; she made the boss of a vast shield; like God's own candle she lit the night. "At home the nightingales would sing," thought Sir Mortimer. "Ah, Philomela, here befits a wilder song than thine!" He looked toward the *Cygnet*, still as a painted ship upon the silver sluggish flood. "When there shall be no more sea, what will seamen do?" Over the marsh wandered the *ignes fatui*. "How restlessly and to no bourne dost thou move, lost soul!" The boy at his feet stirred and sighed. "Poor Robin! Tired and sleepy and frightened, art not? Why, dear knave, the jaguar is not roaring for thee!" Bending, he put an arm about the lad and drew him to his side. "I only wait for the brightness to grow," he said. "Do not shiver so! In a little while we shall be gone."

The moon rose higher and the plain grew spectral, the town a dream town, and the ships dream ships. Ferne turned slightly, so that he might behold the Cordillera. In mystery and enormity the mountains reared

themselves, high as the battlements of heaven, deep as those of hell. The Elizabethan looked long upon them, and he wreathed that utter wall, that sombre and terrific keep, with strange imaginings.

At last the two, master and boy, arose, and climbing the farther slope to the tunal, began to skirt that spiked and thorny circlet, moving warily because to the core it was envenomed. Beneath the sun it swarmed with hideous life; beneath the moon the poison might yet stir. The moon silvered the edge of things, drew illusion like a veil across the haunted ring; below, what hidden foulness! . . . Did the life there know its hideousness? Those lengths and coils, those twisting locks of Medusa, might think themselves desirable. These pulpy, starkly branching cacti, these shrubs that bred poniards, these fibrous ropes, dark and knotted lianas, binding all together like monstrous exaggerations of the tenants of the place, like serpents seen of a drunkard, were they not to themselves as fair as the fairest vine or tree or flower? The dwellers here deceived themselves, never dreamed they were so thwart and distorted.

As he walked, the halo of the moon seemed

to widen until it embraced a quarter of the heavens. The sea beneath was molten silver. A low sound of waves was in his ears, and a wind pressed against him faintly, like a ghost's withstanding. From the woods towards the mountains came a long, bestial cry, hoarse and mournful. "O God," said Sir Mortimer, "whither dost Thou draw us? What am I? What is my meaning and my end?"

Beyond loomed the fortress, all its lineaments blurred, softened, qualitied like a dream by the flooding moonlight. A snake stretching across their path, Sir Mortimer drew his sword, but the creature slipped away, kept before them for a while, then turned aside into its safe home. They came to the place they were seeking. Here was the cactus, taller than its fellows, and gaunt as a gallows-tree, and here the projecting end of a fallen cross. Between showed no vestige of an opening; dark, impervious, formidable as a fortress wall, the tunal met the eye. Ferne, attacking it with his sword, thrust aside a heavy curtain of broad-leaved vine, came upon a network of thorn and spike and prickly leaf, hewed this away, to find behind it a like barrier. Evidently the man had lied!

—to what purpose Sir Mortimer Ferne would presently make it his business to discover. . . . There overtook him a sudden revulsion of feeling, depression of spirit, cold and sick distaste of the place. Torn and breathless, in very savagery over his defeated hope and fool's errand, he thrust with all his strength at the heart of this panoplied foe. His blade, piercing the swart curtain, met with no resistance. With an exclamation he threw himself against that thick-seeming barrier, and so, with Robin-a-dale behind him, burst into a narrow, secret way, masked at entrance and exit, and winding like a serpent through the tunal which surrounded the fortress of Nueva Cordoba.

CHAPTER VI

"NOW Neptune keep the plate-fleet at Cartagena!" whistled Arden, "When I go home I'll dress in cloth of gold, eat tongues of peacocks, and drink dissolved pearls!"

"When I go home I'll build again my father's house," cried Henry Sedley.

"In Plymouth port there's a bark I know," quoth Baldry. "When I go home she's mine—I'll make of her another *Star!*"

"When I go home——" said Sir Mortimer, and paused. The early light was on his face, a deeper light within his eyes that saw the rose which he should gather when he went home. Then, since he would not utter so deep and dear a thought—"When we go home," he said, and began to speak—half in earnest, half in relief from the gravity of the past council—of that returning. By degrees the fire burned, and he whose spirit the live coal touched as it touched Sidney's

and, more rarely, Walter Raleigh's, bore his listeners with him in a rhapsody of anticipation. Long fronds of palm drooped without the room which held them, Englishmen in a world or savage or Spanish, but their spirits followed the speaker to green fields of Kent or Devon. They saw the English summer, saw the twilight fall, heard the lonely tinkle of far sheep-bells, heard the nightingales singing beneath the moon that shone on England. Friends' homes opened to them; Grenville welcomed them to Stowe, Sidney to charmed Penshurst. Then to London and the *Triple Tun*! Bow Bells rang for them; they drank in the inn's long-room; their names were in men's mouths. What welcome, what clashing of the bells, when they should sail up the Thames again—the *Mere Honour*, the *Cygnet*, the *Marigold*, and the *Phœnix*—with treasure in their holds, and for pilot that bright angel Fame! What should they buy with their treasure? What should they do with their fame? Treasure should beget stout ships, stout hearts to sail them; fame, laid to increase, might swell to deathless glory! Sea-captains now, sea-kings would the English be, gathering tribute from the waters and the winds, bringing

gifts to England—frankincense of wealth, myrrh of knowledge, spikenard of power! till, robed and crowned, she rose above the peoples, Joseph's sheaf, Joseph's star!

On went the charmed words, each a lantern flashed on thought, grave, poetic, telling of triumph, yet far removed from gross optimism, not without that strange, melancholy note sounding now and again amongst the age's crashing chords. Abruptly his voice fell, but presently with a lighter note he broke the silence in which his listeners gazed upon the stately vision he had conjured up. "Ah, we will talk to Frank Drake of this night! Canst not hear Richard Hawkins laugh in the *Triple Tun's* long-room? The Queen, too, in her palace will laugh—like a man with the flash in her eye and her white hand clenched! And they whom we love. . . . What is the word for to-night, John Nevil? I may give it? Then—Dione!"

It was the red dawn after his vigil on the fortress hill: in the great room of the stone house the leaders of the expedition had followed, line by line, his sword point as it drew upon the flagging a plan of attack, to which they gave instant adoption; Master Francis Sark had been dismissed, and to the

Admiral's grave hint of possible treachery Ferne had answered, "Ay, John Nevil, I also think him a false-hearted craven, Spaniolated and perverse, a huckster, whose wares do go to the highest bidder! Well, with our hand at his throat do we not bid the highest?"

Now, as he raised his tankard to thirsty lips, suddenly from the square below, shattering all the languid stillness of the tropic dawn, brayed a trumpet, arose a noise of hurrying steps and hasty voices. Baldry, at the window, wheeled, colour in his cheeks, light in his deep eyes.

"War is my mistress! Down the hillside come those to whom I can speak—can speak as well as thou, Sir Mortimer Ferne!" The door was flung open, and Ambrose Wynch, a mighty man in a battered breastplate and morion, looked joyfully in upon them.

"The Dons supped so well last night, Sir John, that now they're coming to breakfast! 'Tis just a flourish—no great sortie. Shall a handful of us go out against them?"

That sally from the fortress was led by Mexia, who somewhat burned to wipe out the memory of his lost battery at the river's

mouth. And as blind Fortune's dearest favour flutters often to the lackey while the master snatches vainly, so it befell in this case, for Mexia's chance raid, a piece of mere bravado to which De Guardiola had given grudging consent, was productive of results. Bravado for bravado, interchange of chivalric folly, of magnificence that was not war—forth to meet the Spaniard and his company must go no greater force of Englishmen! Luiz de Guardiola, Governor of Nueva Cordoba, kept his state in his fortress; therefore, Sir John Nevil, Admiral of the English, and of no less worth than the Castilian, remained for this skirmish inactive. On both sides their captains played the game.

Sir Mortimer Ferne and Robert Baldry, at the head of threescore men, some mounted, some on foot, deemed themselves and this medley sufficient for Pedro Mexia. Nor can it be said that their reckoning was at fault, since Mexia, deep in curses, had at last to make hasty way across the strip of plain between Nueva Cordoba and its fortress. Too easily did the English repel an idle sortie, too eagerly did they follow Mexia in retreat, for suddenly Chance, leaving all neutrality, threw herself a goddess armed,

upon the Spanish side. In the very shadow of the hill, the mounted English, well ahead of those on foot, Mexia's disordered band making for the shelter of the tunal, a Spaniard turned, raised his harquebus and fired. The great bay steed which bore Sir Mortimer Ferne reared, screamed, then fell, hurling its rider to earth, where he lay, senseless, stark in black armour, with a knot of rose-coloured velvet in his crest.

No hawk like De Guardiola was Pedro Mexia, but when luck pinioned his prey his talons were strong to close upon it. Now on the instant he wheeled, swooped with all his might upon the disordered vanguard of the English. Baldry and those with him fought madly, the English on foot made all haste; the prostrate figure, pinned beneath the dying bay, became the centre of the wild melée, the hotly contested prize of friend and foe! Then burst from the tunal, came at a run down the hill, reinforcements for Mexia. . . .

Erelong, Don Luiz de Guardiola sent to inform Sir John Nevil that he had for his prisoner one of the latter's captains. It appeared to the Governor of Nueva Cordoba that the English held the man in some esteem

—perchance even that he was their leader's close friend. Sir John Nevil would understand that to a Spanish soldier and good son of the Church the prisoner was, inevitably, mere pirate and heretic, to be dealt with as such.

To this announcement John Nevil returned curt answer. Nueva Cordoba lay in the hollow of his hand, and at his disposal were some Spanish lives perhaps not altogether valueless in the eyes of Don Luiz de Guardiola, since their kindred and friends and Spain herself might hold him responsible for their sudden and piteous taking off.

When an hour had dragged itself away the fortress spoke again, and its speech was of a piece with the Governor's mind. The peril of the town and the lives within it was ignored. Bluntly, the price of Sir Mortimer Ferne's life was this—and this—and this!

The Admiral made reply that Honour was too dear a price for the life of any English gentleman. He and Sir Mortimer Ferne declined the terms of Don Luiz de Guardiola. The safety of his friend should, however, ransom a city. Deliver the captive sound in life and limb, and the English would withdraw

from Nueva Cordoba, and proceed with their ships upon their way. Reject this offer, let harm befall their prisoner, and Don Luiz de Guardiola should see how John Nevil mourned his friends!

The Governor answered that his terms held. The evening before, the English leader had been pleased to announce that if by moonrise of this night he had not in hand fifty thousand ducats, Nueva Cordoba should lie in ashes; now Don Luiz Guardiola, more generous, gave Sir John Nevil until the next sunrise to heap upon the quay at the Bocca all gold and silver, all pearls, jewels, wrought work and other treasure stolen from the King of Spain, to withdraw every English soul from the galleon *San José*, leaving her safe anchored in the river, and above her the Spanish flag, to abandon town and battery and retire to his ships, under oath, upon the delivery to him of the prisoner, to quit at once and for ever these seas. Did the first beams of the sun find the English yet in Nueva Cordoba, then the light should also behold the death with ignominy of the prisoner.

"He will not die with ignominy," spoke the Admiral when the herald had come and

gone. "Death cannot wear a form so base that he, nobly dying, will not ennoble."

"Do you purpose, then, that he shall die?" demanded Baldry roughly.

"I purpose that if he lives I may look him in the face," answered the other. "We may not buy his life with the dishonour of us all." His stern face working, he covered his bearded lips with his hand. "But as God lives, he shall not die! We have until the next sunrising."

"There is more in it than meets the eye," said Arden. "These monstrous conditions! . . . One would say that the Spaniard means there shall be no rescue."

Henry Sedley broke in passionately. "Ay, that is it! Did you not hear their talk last night?"

"For many a year, as I have gone jostling up and down, I have studied the faces of men," pursued Arden. "With this Governor the cart draws the horse, and his particular quarrel takes precedence of his public duty. I think that in the wreaking of a grudge he would stand at nothing."

The Admiral paced the floor. Arden, eyeing him, spoke again with emotion.

"Mortimer Ferne is as dear to me as to

you, John Nevil! . . . I think of the men of the *Minion* and of John Oxenham."

In the silence that followed his words each man had his vision of the men of the *Minion* and of John Oxenham. Then Baldry spoke, roughly and loudly, as was his wont—

"I think not of the dead, for whom there's no help. For the living man, he and I have yet to meet! There is to-night—there is the path he found—no doubt he counts upon our attacking as was planned! He is subtle with his words—no doubt he'll hold them off—insinuate—make them look only to the seaward——"

The Admiral, coming to the table, leaned his weight upon it. "Gentlemen, you all do know that this is my friend, whom I love as David of old loved Jonathan. Of the value of his life, of that great promise which his death would cut short, I will not speak. I also think that this Governor, believing himself, the treasure, and his men-at-arms secure, careth naught for the town whose protector he is called. Therefore an' we would save the man who is dear to us and to England from I know not what fate, from the fate perhaps of John Oxenham, this night must we take by storm the fortress, using the plan

of attack, the hour, ay and the word of the night, which he gave us. If it is now less simple a thing, if this Spaniard will surely keep watch and ward to-night, yet there is none to tell him that, offering at his face, we do mean to strike him in the back. If your onslaught be but swift and furious enough we may, God willing, bring forth in triumph both the treasure and the man whose welfare so outweighs the treasure."

"Amen to that," answered Arden; "but I have a boding spirit. It seems to me that the blessed sun himself hath shrunken, and I would I might wring the neck of yonder yelling bird! . . . That Englishman, that Francis Sark—he is well guarded?"

"Ralph Walter guards him," said the Admiral briefly. "There is but the one door; the window is barred, and too narrow for the passage of a child. . . . Yea, I grant, as did Mortimer Ferne, his knavery, but now, as nearly as we can sail to the wind of the truth, the man, desiring restitution and reward, speaks plain honesty."

"He spoke 'plain honesty' after the taking of the *San José*," muttered Arden. "Yet we found a hawk where we looked for a wren's nest. Oh, I grant you there were

explanations enough to stand between him and the yard-arm, and that Fortune, having turned her wheel in our favour, apparently left her industry and fell asleep! She awakened this morning."

"Wring thine own neck for a bird of ill omen!" began Baldry, to be cut short by the Admiral's grave "Where all's danger, whatever course we shape, who gives a safer chart?" Then, as no one spoke: "To our loss we have found both shoal and reef between us and yonder castle. Think you not that I know, as knew Sir Mortimer Ferne, that we are shown a doubtful channel by a shifty pilot? But beyond is the open sea of all our hopes. Fortune and her wheel, Giles Arden!—nay, rather God and His hand over the issues of life and death!"

Up in his white fortress that same hour De Guardiola heard in silence the Admiral's message of defiance, then when he and Mexia were again alone frowned thoughtfully over a slip of paper which by devious ways had shortly before reached his hand. With all their vigilance not every hole and crevice could the English stop; Spanish was the town and Spanish the overhanging fortress,

and the former was the place of many women and priests. The conquerors strove to secure the place as with a fowler's net, yet now and again a bird of the air fluttered through their meshes. The paper which Don Luiz held ran as follows: "May not a countryman of heretics choose his own king? When Death peers too closely—as was the case upon the galleon *San José*—may not a man turn his coat and send Death seeking elsewhere? Death gone by, may not the man be willing (if it be so that he is not well entreated of his new masters) to take again the colours to which on a Corpus Christi day of which you wot he swore fealty? At sunrise this morning the English laid toils for you. I have knowledge to sell. Will you buy my wares with five thousand pesos of silver and the letter to Cartagena which I desired? . . . I wrap this in a fig leaf and drop it from the window to Dolores laughing with the seamen below. If you will buy, then raise above the battery a pennant of red that may be seen from the room with the hidden door in the Friar's house."

"The dog! I thought that he perished with Antonio de Castro!" spoke Mexia.

"That he did not," answered the Governor.

"He is so false that were there none else with whom to play the traitor, his right hand would betray his left. . . . The English called him Francis Sark."

"You'll pay?"

"He shall think I'll pay," said the other. "So they lay their toils!—it needs not this paper to tell me that;" he tapped it as it lay before him. "Somewhat will this Englishman, this Nevil, do to-night. He hath his game in his mind—his hand on this piece, his eye on that, these pawns in reserve, those advanced for action." De Guardiola leaned back in his chair and studied the ceiling. "Ha, Pedro! we must discover what he would do! When I know his dispositions, blessed Mother of God, what check may I not give him!"

"But if Desmond escapes not," began the duller Mexia, "we may learn not at all, or we may learn too late. Then all's conjecture. They fight like fiends, and day by day we lose. What if they overbear us yet?"

Don Luiz brought his gaze from the ceiling to meet the look of the lesser man. Mexia fidgeted, at last burst forth: "There are times when the devil dwells in your eye and

upon your lip! 'Twas so you smiled in the Valdez matter and when that slave girl died! What do you mean?"

"Mean?" answered De Guardiola, still smiling. "I mean, my friend, that we must know what traps they bait down yonder." He called to those who waited without, wrote an order and sent it to the officer in command at the battery. "Up goes one traitor's signal! . . . Good Pedro, when Fate gives to you your enemy; says, 'Now! Revenge yourself to the uttermost!'—what do you do?"

"Why, I take his life," answered Mexia. "Then shall he trouble me no more."

"Now I," said Don Luiz, "I give him memories of me. Mayhap the dead do not remember. So live my foe! but live in hell, remembering the brand upon thy soul and that it was I who set it glowing there!"

"Well, I am thy friend, am I not?" quoth Mexia comfortably. "I am not Englishman nor Valdez nor Cimmaroon slave, and so I fear not thy smile. It is twelve of the clock. . . . Do you think that Desmond knows so much?"

"Not more than one other," answered De Guardiola, and called for a flask of wine.

The day wore on in heat and light, white glare from the hill, and from the sea fierce gleams of blue steel. The coasts loomed, the plain moved in the hot air. Here the plain was arid, and there yellow flowers turned it to a ragged Field of Cloth of Gold. The gaunt cacti stood rigid, and the palms made no motion where they dipped against the blue. In cohorts to and fro went the coloured birds; along the sandy shores, rose pink and scarlet and white, crowded the flamingoes; crept on the noonday stillness; came the slow afternoon, the sun declined, and every hour of that day had been long, long! One would have said that it was the longest day of the year. Throughout it, dominant upon its ascending ground, white, impregnable, and silent as a sepulchre, rose the fortress. Before the fortress, slumberous also, couched the long, low fortification of stone and earthwork commanding in its turn the road through the tunal. In the town below, alcalde and friar waited trembling upon the English Admiral with representations that the quality of mercy is not strained. The slight rills of gold yet hidden in Nueva Cordoba burst forth and began to flow fast and more fast toward the English quarters.

From the churches, Dominican and Franciscan, wailed the *miserere*, and the women and children trembled beneath the roofs which at any moment might no longer give them sanctuary. For all the blazing sunshine, the place began to wear a look of doom.

During the day the English dragged Mexia's conquered guns to the edge of the town, and under their cover threw up earthworks, and planted their artillery where it might speak with effect. Spanish soldiery appeared before the battery, and, according to the tactics of the time, began to make thorny with abattis, poisoned stakes, and other devices, the way of the enemy across the open space which it guarded. English marksmen picked them off, others took their place; they falling also, one great gun from the fort bellowed defiance. Its echoes ceasing, silence again wrapped the white ascent and all that crowned it. For days now each antagonist had that knowledge of the other that ammunition was the pearl of price only to be fully shown by warrant of circumstance.

The sun in sinking cast a strange light. It stained the sea, and the air so partook of that glow that town and fortress sprang into red significance. The river also, where

swung the dark ships, was ensanguined, as was every ripple upon the shore, where now the birds grew very clamorous. There were no clouds; only the red ball of the sun descending, and a clear field for the stars. The evening wind arose; at last the day died; unheralded by any dusk, on came the night. Colour of blood changed to colour of gold, gleamed and glistened the sea, sparkled the fireflies, shone the deep stars; over the marsh flared the will-o'-the-wisp like a torch lit to bad ends.

Nueva Cordoba was held by two-thirds of the English force; now for the Spaniards' greater endangering down from each ship's side came, man by man, well-nigh all of that division which looked to the safety of the fleet. So great was the prize, so intolerable any idea of defeated purpose, that for this night—this night only—the balances could not be evenly held. Precaution lifted from one side added weight to the other, and the borrowing from Peter became of less moment than the paying of Paul. Day by day, north and east and west, watchmen in the tops of the *Mere Honour*, the *Cygnet*, the *Marigold*, and the *Phœnix* had seen no hostile sail upon the bland and smiling ocean. The river ran

in mazes; undulating like a serpent it came from hidden sources, and its heavy borders of tamarind and mangrove sent long shadows out toward midstream. The watchmen looked to the river also; but no greater thing ever appeared than some Indian canoe gliding down from illimitable forests. Now the ships were left maimed for what was meant to be the briefest while. The sick manned them; together with a handful of the unhurt they looked down from the decks and whispered farewells to their comrades in the boats below. High above the boats towered the black hulls; the topmasts overlooked sea and land; the bold figureheads, that had drunk the brine of many a storm and looked unmoved upon strange sights, gazed into the darkness with inscrutable blank eyes.

Silently the boats made landing, swiftly and silently through the darkness two hundred men crossed the little plain, and their leader was Robert Baldry. Out from Nueva Cordoba, stealing through the ruined and depopulated quarter of the town, came a shadowy band, and they from the town and they from the river met at the base of the long, westward slope of the hill. Thence they climbed to the rocky plateau where, the night before, Sir

Mortimer Ferne had made pause. Here they halted, while Henry Sedley and ten men went on to the tunal as, the night before, one man had gone. By the signs that Ferne had given them they found the entrance which they sought, and when they had thrust aside the curtain of branch and vine, saw the clearing through the tunal. It lay beneath the stars, a narrow defile much overgrown, walled on either side by the impenetrable wood. On went Sedley and his men, cautiously, silently, until they had well-nigh pierced the tunal, that was scarce wider, indeed, than an English copse. Before them, quiet as a tomb, rose the fortress—no sound save their stealthy movement and the stir of life that was native to the woods, no sign of sentience other than their own. Back they went to the plateau and made report, then with Baldry and half of all the English force waited for the Admiral's attack upon that notable fortification which guarded the known entrance through the tunal.

Rising ground and the bulk of the fortress hid from them the battery; they would hear, not see, John Nevil's onslaught, so now they watched the east for the silver signal of attack. Not long did they watch.

Above the waters the firmament became milk white; an argent line appeared, thickened —one moment of the moon, then tumult, shouting, the blast of a trumpet, the sound of small arms, and the roar of those guns which must be rushed upon and silenced! Noises of bird and beast had the tropic night, all the warfare and the wrangling with which life exacts tribute from life, but now the feud of man with man voiced itself to the stars. So great and stern was the uproar that it seemed as though John Nevil might oversweep with his iron determination that too formidable battery and unaided seize upon the fortress.

No tarrying after the burst of sound and light made Baldry and his men. Up the steep ground they swept toward that pale, invulnerable castle borne upon the shoulder of the hill, faintly outlined against the pallid east. On they came, a long thin line of men of England to that secret path through the tunal. Devon was there, and Kent and Sussex and many a goodly shire beside. Men of land-fights and of sea-fights were they, and of old adventures to alien countries, strong of heart and frame, and very fiercely minded toward the fortress of Nueva Cordoba. It

withheld from them the gold they wanted, and now within its grasp was a life they valued. To-night their will was set to take the one and rescue the other. They saw the treasure heaped and gleaming, and they saw the face and waved hand of Mortimer Ferne. They heard him laugh and gaily cry his thanks.

They entered the defile. To the right and the left rose the impenetrable wood; before them wound a path thorny and difficult, where not more than three men might go abreast; beyond was the mass of the fortress. On through the impeding growth, where passage was just possible, rushed Baldry and his men. The way was not long, larger loomed the fortress, louder grew the noise of attack and defence. At last the edge of the tunal was reached, and they in the van, freed from hindrance and delay, sprang forward over open ground, marked here and there by low bushes and some trailing growth, sweeping around the fortress to the rear of the battery, and apparently of a solidity with the universal frame of things.

Suddenly, beneath the footing of the foremost, the earth gave way and a line

of men stumbled, and pitched forward into a trench which had been digged, which had been planted with pointed sticks, which had been cunningly covered over by a leafy roof so thin that a child had broken through. Not until toward the sunset of that day had Don Luiz de Guardiola received information which enabled him to lay snares, but since that hour he had worked with frantic haste. Now he knew the moment when his springe would be trodden upon, the number of them who would come stealthily through the tunal to that gin, the nature of Nevil's attack upon the front, what guard had been left in the town, what upon the ships. His information was minute and accurate, and, hawk and serpent, he acted upon it with fierceness and with guile.

The onward rush of the English had been impetuous. They in the rear of the first upon that frail bridge, unable to stay their steps, plunged also into the trench; those who were latest to clear the tunal surged forward in consternation and confusion. Suddenly, from a low earthwork hastily raised in the shadow of the fortress wall, and masked by bushes, burst a withering fire of chain-shot from cannon and culverin, of

slighter missiles from falcon and bastard and saker, caliver and harquebus. The trench, dug in a half circle, either end touching the tunal, made with the space it enclosed, and which was now crowded by the English, an iron trap, into which with thunder and flame the Spanish ordnance was pouring death.

CHAPTER VII

THEY who saw the full promise of the night in one instant of time dashed from their lips and lost in desert sands struggled fiercely with their fate. Baldry's great figure at their head, Baldry's great voice shouting encouragement, they strove to pass the trench, to rush upon and overwhelm the masked batteries, the hidden marksmen. An effectual *chevaux-de-frise*, the pointed stakes withstood them, tore them, and threw them back. Effort upon effort, a wild crossing over the interlaced bodies of the fallen, a forward rush upon the guns, a loud "'Ware the vines!" from Baldry—another and a wider ditch, irregular and shallow, but lined with thorns like stilettoes, and strung from side to side with lianas strong as ropes to entangle, to bring prone upon the thorns the desperate men who strove in the snare. A small band won to the farther side, but the shot was as a blast of winter among sere

leaves, and terribly thinned their ranks. All was vain, all hopeless; to advance, destruction; to tarry in that arena amidst the deadly thunder of the guns, no less a thing.

"Back, back!" shouted Baldry. Back through the tunal—back to the Admiral at the main battery. Here all's lost!"

Above the din rose his voice. Back to the one door of safety surged the English, but the way was narrow from that pit into which they had been betrayed. The guns yet spoke; men dropped with an answering groan or with a wild cry to their comrades not to leave them behind in that fatal trench, upon Death's harvest-field. How in the murk and rain of death could the whole gather the maimed, know the living from the dead? Barely might the uninjured save themselves, give support perhaps to some hurt and staggering comrade. Happy were the dead; for the fallen whose wounds were not mortal, perhaps the fate of the men of the *Minion!* Of the company which had come with Robert Baldry through the tunal to take by surprise the fortress of Nueva Cordoba hardly a third found again its shelter, turned drawn faces to the sea, rushed from that death-trap, through the bitter and

fatal wood, toward hillside and plain, and the Admiral's attack upon that fortification which with all their force they had twice endeavoured to storm and found impregnable.

Baldry himself? Surely he was among them!—in that shadowy pass was not this his great form—or this—or this?

"Baldry! Robert Baldry!" cried Sedley, and there came no answer. High and shrill as a woman's wail rang again the young man's voice. "Captain Robert Baldry!"

"He's not here, sir," said a Devon man, softly. "God rest his soul!"

Sedley raised his white face to the stars, then: "On men, on! We've to help Sir John, you know!" Tone of voice, raised arm, and waving hand, subtle and elusive likeness to the leader whom he worshipped, upon whom he had moulded himself—for the moment it was as though Sir Mortimer Ferne had cried encouragement to their sunken hearts, was beckoning them on to ultimate victory plucked from present defeat. A cheer, wavering, broken, touched with hysteria, broke from throats that were dry with the horror of past moments. On with Henry Sedley, their leader now, they struggled,

making what mad haste they might through the tunal.

In wrath and grief, set of face, hot of heart, they burst at last from the tunal into the open, with sky and sea, the plain, the town and the river before them—the river where the ships lay in safety, the *Cygnet* and the *Phœnix* close in shore, the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold* in midstream. The ships in safety—then what meant those distant cries, that thrice-repeated booming of a signal gun, that glare upon the river, those two boats filled with rowers making mad haste up the stream, that volley from the *Mere Honour's* stern guns beneath which sank one of the hurrying craft ?

Turned to stone, they upon the hillside watched disaster at her work. The *Cygnet* was a noble ship, co-equal in size and strength with the *Mere Honour*, well beloved and well defended. Now for one instant of time a great leap of flame from her decks lit all the scene and showed her in her might ; it was followed by a frightful explosion, and the great ship, torn from her anchorage, wrecked for ever, a flaming hulk, a torch, a pyre, a potent of irremediable ruin, bore down the swift current and struck the *Phœnix*. . . .

Once more the *Mere Honour's* cannon thundered loud appeal and warning. In the red light cast by her destroyer the galleon began to sink, and that so rapidly that her seamen threw themselves overboard. Yet burning, the *Cygnet* kept on her way. Borne by the tide she passed from the narrow to the wider waters; to-night a waning star, the morn might find her a blackened derelict, if indeed there was sign of her at all upon the surface of the sea.

Around the base of the hill swept the Admiral and his force. Vain had been the attack upon the fortress, heavy the loss of the English, but it was not the Spanish guns which had caused that retreat. Where were Robert Baldry and his men? What strange failure, unlooked-for disaster, portended that heavy firing at the rear of the fortress? . . . The signal gun! The ships!

John Nevil and his company left attacking for ever the fortress of Nueva Cordoba, and rushed down the hillside toward plain and river. Forth from the town burst Ambrose Wynch with the guard which had been left in the square—but where were Robert Baldry and his men? Were these they—this dwindled band staggering, leaping down from the

heights, led by Henry Sedley, grey, exhausted, speaking in whispers or in strained, high voices? No time was there for explanation, bewildered conjecture, tragic apprehension. Scarcely had the three parties joined, when hard upon their heels came De Guardiola and all his men-at-arms. Nevil wheeled, fought them back, set face again to the river, but his adversaries chose not to have it so.

They achieved their purpose, for he gave them battle on the plain, at his back the red light from the river, before him that bitter, triumphant fortress. Hard and long did they fight in a death struggle, fierce and implacable, where quarter was neither asked nor given. Nevil himself bore a charmed life, but many a gentleman adventurer, many a simple soldier or mariner gasped his last upon Spanish pike or sword. Not fifty paces from the river bank Henry Sedley received his quietus. He had fought as one inspired, all his being tempered to a fine agony of endeavour too high for suffering or for thought. So now when Arden caught him, falling, it was with an unruffled brow and a smile remote and sweet that he looked up at the other's haggard, twisted features.

"My knighthood's yet to seek," he said. "It matters not. Tell my Captain that as I fought for him here, so I wait for him in Christ His court. Tell my sister Damaris—" He was gone, and Arden, rising, slew the swordsman to whom his death was due.

Still fighting, the English reached the brim of the river and the boats that were hidden there. The *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold* were now their cities of refuge. Lost was the town, lost any hope of the fortress and what it contained, lost the *Cygnet* and the *Phœnix*, lost Henry Sedley and Robert Baldry and many a gallant man besides, lost Sir Mortimer Ferne. Gall and vinegar and Dead Sea fruit and frustrated promise this night held for them who had been conquerors and confident.

They saw the *Cygnet*, yet burning, upon her way to the open sea; from the galleon *San José* it was gone to join the caravels. Wreckage strewed the river's bosom, and for those who had manned the two ships, destroyer and destroyed, where were they? Down with the *allegartos* and the river slime—yet voyaging with the *Cygnet*—rushing, a pale accusing troop toward God's justice bar? . . . The night was waxing old, the

dawn was coming. Upon the *Mere Honour* Baptist Manwood, a brave and honest soul who did his duty, steered his ship, encouraged his men, fought the Spaniard and made no more ado, trained his guns upon the landing, and with their menace kept back the enemy while, boatload after boatload, the English left the bank and reached in safety the two ships that were left them.

The day was breaking in red intolerable splendour, a terrible glory illuminating the *Mere Honour*, and the *Marigold*, the river and the sandy shore where gathered the flamingoes and the herons and the egrets, as the Admiral, standing on the poop of the *Mere Honour*, pressed the hands of those his officers that were spared to him, and spoke simply and manfully, as had spoken Francis Drake, to the gentlemen adventurers who had risked life and goods in this enterprise, and to the soldiers and mariners gathered in the waist; then listened in silence to the story of the disaster. Nor Robert Baldry nor Henry Sedley were there to make report, but a grizzled man-at-arms told of the trap beyond the tunal into which Baldry had been betrayed. "How did the Dons come to know, Sir John? We'll take our oath that

the trench was newly dug, and sure no such devil's battery as opened on us was planted there before this night! 'Twas a traitor or a spy that wrought us deadly harm!" He ended with a fearful imprecation, and an echo of his oath came from his fellows in defeat.

Michael Thynne, Master of the *Cygnet*, a dazed and bleeding figure, snatched from the water by one of the *Marigold's* boats, spoke for his ship. "Came to us that were nearest the shore a boat out of the shadow, and we saw but four or may be five rowers. 'Who goes there?' calls I, standing by the big culverin. 'The word or we fire!' One in the boat stands up. '*Dione*,' says he, and on comes the boat under our stern." He put up an uncertain hand to a ghastly wound in his forehead. . . . "Well, your Honour, as I was saying, they were Spaniards, after all, and a many of them, for they were hidden in the bottom of the boat. '*Dione*,' says they, and I lean over the rail to see if 'twere black Humphrey clambering up to know what was wanted. . . . After that I don't remember—but one had a pistolet, I think. . . . There was another boat that came after them—and we were but twenty men in all. They swarmed over the side and they cut us

down. They must ha' found the magazine, for they fired the ship—they fired the *Cygnet*, Sir John, and it bore down with the tide and struck the *Phœnix*." His voice falling, one caught and drew him aside to the chirurgeon's care.

The Admiral turned to Ambrose Wynch, who burst forth with: "Sir John Nevil, as I have hope of heaven, I swear I did guard that man as you bade me do! The room was safe, the window high and barred, the door locked——"

"I doubt not that you did your duty, Ambrose Wynch," spoke the Admiral. "But the man escaped——"

"At the nooning he was safe enough," pursued the other, with agitation. "I, going the rounds, looked in and saw him sitting on his bed, smiling at me like a woman—Satan take his soul! I left Ralph Winter in the hall without, and you know him for a staunch man. . . . When we heard the *Mere Honour's* guns, and the town rose against us who were left within it, and I and my handful were cutting our way out to join you, Walter got to my side for a moment. 'He's gone!' says he. 'When I heard the alarum I went to fetch him forth to the square with

me—and he was not there! When he went and how, except the devil aided him, I know no more than you!'"

"Where is Ralph Walter?" said the Admiral.

"Dead on the plain yonder!" groaned his lieutenant, and sitting down, covered his face with his hands.

From the main-deck arose a long, shrill cry. Arden drew a shuddering breath.

"It's that boy Robin! Had they not bound him he would have thrown himself overboard. I doubt you'll have to flog his senses back to him."

Robin-a-dale's voice again, this time from the break of the poop; Robin-a-dale himself upon them, his bonds broken, his eyeballs starting, a wild blue-jerkined Ariel filled with tidings. In this moment a scant respecter of persons, he threw himself upon Nevil, pointing and stammering, inarticulate with the wealth of his discovery. The eyes of the two men followed his lean, brown finger. . . . Above the quay where boats made landing a sand-spit ran out from the tamarind-shadowed bank, and now in the red dawning the mist that clung to it lifted. A man who for an hour had lain heavily in the heavy

shadow where he had been left by De Guardiola's picked men had arisen, and with feeble and uncertain steps was treading the sand-spit in the direction of the ships. Even as Nevil and Arden looked where Robin's shaking forefinger bade them look, he raised and waved his hand. It was the shadow of an old familiar gesture.

Before the cockboat reached the point he had fallen, first on his knee, then prone upon the sand. It was in that deep swoon that he was brought aboard the *Mere Honour* and laid in the Admiral's cabin, whence Arden, leaving the chirurgeon and Robin-a-dale with the yet unconscious man, presently came forth to the Admiral and to Ambrose Wynch and asked for *aqua vitæ*, then drew his hand across his brow and wiped away the cold sweat; finally found voice with which to load with curses Luiz de Guardiola and his ministers. The Admiral listening, kept his still look upon the fortress. When Arden had ended his imprecations he spoke with a quiet voice—

"I love a knightly foe," he said. "For that churl and satyr yonder, may God keep him in safety until we come again!"

"Till we come again!" Arden cried, in the

fierceness of his unwonted passion. "Are we not here? Why is the boatswain calling? Why do we make sail, and that so hastily?"

"Look!" said Ambrose Wynch, gruffly, and pointed to the west. "The plate-fleet!"

Those many white flecks upon the horizon grew larger, swelled to apparent sails. Forth from the river's mouth, out to sea, put the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold*, for they might not tarry to meet that squadron. None that looked upon Nevil's face doubted that though now he went, he would come again. But he must gather other ships, replace his dead, renew his strength by the touch of his mother earth. Home therefore to England, to the friends and foes of a man's own house! To the eastward turned the prows of the English's ships; the sails filled, the shores slipped past. In the town the bells were ringing, on the plain were figures moving; from the fortress boomed a gun, and the sound was like a taunt, was like a blow upon the cheek. Swift answer made the cannon of both ships, and the sullen, defiant roar awoke the echoes. Taunt might they give for taunt. Three ships had the English taken, three towns had they sacked; in sea-fights and in land-fights they had been

victors! Where were the caravels, where the ruined battery at the river's mouth, where the great magazine of Nueva Cordoba? Where was Antonio de Castro?—and the galleon *San José* was lost to friend as well as foe—and Spaniard no more than Englishman might gather again the sunken treasure. Thus spake the guns, but the hearts of the men behind were wrung for the living and the dead. The shores slipped by, the fortress hill of Nueva Cordoba lessened to a silver speck against the mountains; swift-sailing ships, they feared no chase by those galleons of Spain. Islands were passed, behind them fell bold coasts, before them spread the waste of waters. Beyond the waste there was home, where friend and foe awaited tidings of the expedition which had gone forth big with promise.

In the *Mere Honour's* state-cabin upon the evening of that decisive day were gathered a number of the adventurers who had staked life and goods in this enterprise. Not all were there who had sailed from England to the Spanish seas. Then as now, England paid tithes of her younger sons to violent death. Many men were missing whose voices the air seemed yet to hold. They had out-

stripped their comrades, they had gone before: what bustling highways or what lonely paths they were treading, what fare they were tasting, for what mark they were making, and upon what long, long adventure bound—these were hidden things to the travellers left behind in this murky segment of life. But to the strained senses of the men upon whom, as yet, had hardly fallen the upas languor of accepted defeat, before whose eyes, whether shut or open, yet passed insistent visions of last night's events, like an echo, like a shade, old presences made themselves felt. Swinging lanterns dimly lit the cabin of the *Mere Honour*, and in ranks the shadows rose and fell along its swaying walls. From without, the sound of the sea came like an inarticulate murmur of far-away voices. There were vacant places at the table, and upon the long benches that ran beneath the windows; yet, indefinably, there seemed no less a company than in the days before the taking of the galleon *San José* and the town of Nueva Cordoba. One arose restlessly and looked out upon the star-rimmed sea, then in haste turned back to the lit cabin and passed his hand before his eyes. "I thought I saw the *Phœnix*,"

he said, "huge and tall, with Robert Baldry leaning over the side." Another groaned, "I had rather see the *Cygnet* that was our best-loved ship!" At the mention of the *Cygnet* they looked towards a door. "How long his stupor holds!" quoth Ambrose Wynch. "Well, God knows 'tis better dreaming than awaking!" The door opened and Sir Mortimer Ferne stood before them.

From the Admiral to the last ne'er-do-weel of a noble house all sprang to their feet. "God!" said one, under his breath, and another's tankard fell clattering from his shaking hand. Nevil, the calm accustomed state, the iron quiet of his nature quite broken, advanced with agitation. "Mortimer, Mortimer!" he cried, and would have put his arms about his friend, but Ferne stayed him with a gesture and a look that none might understand. Behind him came Robin-a-dale, slipped beneath his outstretched arm, then with head thrown back and wild defiant eyes faced the little throng of adventurers. "He's mad!" he shrilled. "My master's mad! He says strange things—but don't you mind them, gentles. . . . Oh! Sir John Nevil, don't you mind them——"

"Robin!" said Ferne, and the boy was silent.

Arden pushed forward the huge and heavy chair from the head of the board. "Stand not there before us like the shade of him who was Mortimer Ferne," he cried, his dark face working. "Sit here among us who dearly love you, truest friend and noblest gentleman! Pour wine for him one of you!"

Ferne made no motion of acquiescence. He stood against the door which had shut behind him and looked from man to man.

"Humphrey Carewe—and you, Gilbert—and you, Giles Arden—why are you here upon the *Mere Honour?* The *Cygnet* is your ship." None answering him, his eyes travelled to others of the company. "You, Darrell, and you, Black Will Cotesworth, were of the *Phœnix.* What do you here? . . . The water rushes by and the timbers creak and strain. Whither do we go under press of sail?"

Before the intensity of his regard the men shrank back appalled. A moment passed then. "My friend, my friend!" cried Nevil hoarsely, "you have suffered. . . . Rest until to-morrow."

The other looked steadfastly upon him.

"Why, 'tis so that I have been through the fires of hell. Certain things were told me there—but I have thought that perhaps they were not true. Tell me the truth."

The silence seemed long before with recovered calmness the Admiral spoke. "Take the truth, then, from my lips, and bear it highly. As we had plotted so we did, but that vile toad, that ingrained traitor, learning, we know not how, each jot and tittle of our plan, and escaping by some secret way, sold us to disaster such as has not been since Fayal in the Azores! For on land we fought to no avail, and by treachery the Spaniards seized the *Cygnet*, slew the men upon her, and fired her powder room. Dressed in flame she bore down upon, struck, and sunk the *Phœnix*. . . . Now we are the *Mere Honour* and the *Marigold*, and we go under press of sail because behind us, whitening the waters that we have left, is the plate-fleet from Cartagena."

"Where is Robert Baldry?" asked Ferne.

"In the hands of Don Luiz de Guardiola—dead or living we know not. He and a hundred men came not forth from the tunal—stayed behind in the snare the Spaniard had set for them."

"Where is Henry Sedley?"

"He died in my arms, Mortimer, thrust through by a pike in that bitter fight upon the plain!" Arden made reply. "I was to tell you that he waited for you in Christ His court."

"Then will he wait for aye," said the man who leaned so heavily against the door. "Or till Christ beckons in Iscariot."

They looked at him, thinking his mind distraught, not wondering that it should be so. He read their thought and smiled, but his eyes that smiled not met Arden's. "Great God!" cried the latter, shrank back against the table and put out a shaking hand.

Slowly Ferne left the support of the wood and straightened his racked frame until it stood erect, a figure yet graceful, yet stately, but pathetic and terrible, bearing as it did deep marks of Spanish hatred. The face was ghastly in its gleaming pallor, in its effect of a beautiful mask fitted to tragedy too utter for aught but stillness. He wore no doublet, and his shirt was torn and stained with blood, but in last and subtlest mockery De Guardiola had restored to him his sword. He drew it now, held the blade across his knee, and with one effort of all his strength

broke the steel in twain, then threw the pieces from him, and turned his sunken eyes upon the Admiral. "I beg the shortest shrift that you may give," he said. "It is I who, when they tormented me, told them all. Hang me now, John Nevil, in the starlight."

The Admiral's lips moved, but there came from them no sound, nor was there sound in the cabin of the *Mere Honour*. Not the *Cygnet* or the *Phœnix* were more quiet far away, far below, on the grey levels of the sea. At last a voice—Ambrose Wynch's—broke the silence that had grown too great to bear. "It was Francis Sark," he said, and again monotonously, "It was Francis Sark—it was Francis Sark." Another swore with a great oath, "'Tis as the boy says—they've crazed him with their torments!" Humphrey Carewe, a silent and a dogged man, who wore not his heart upon his sleeve, broke into a passionate cry: "Sir Mortimer Ferne! Sir Mortimer Ferne!"

To them all it seemed that the name broke the spell that was upon them. The name stood for very much. Carewe's outcry called up a cloud of witnesses—the deeds of a man's lifetime—and marshalled them against this

monstrous accusation of a sick and whirling hour. "You know not what you say!" spoke Nevil, harshly. "Good and evil are blent in you as in all men, but God used no traitorous or craven stuff in your making! Rest now: speak to us to-morrow!"

Again he would have advanced, but the man at the door waved him back, smiled once more with his lips alone. "Ah, you all are dear to me! But do you know I prefer your hatred to your love? Give me your hatred and let me go. I am not mad nor do I lie to you. . . . Before the sunset, when I had borne torment through the day, I bore it no longer. They loosed me and dashed water in my face, and Luiz de Guardiola said over to me the words that I have spoken. Then he went forth and laid his snares. . . . And so Robert Baldry is lost, he and a hundred men besides? And Spaniards coming down the river took the *Cygnet* because they knew the word of the night?" A spasm distorted the masklike features, but in a moment it was done. "I should be a madman," he said, "for once I walked before you with a high head and a proud heart. It seems that I knew not

myself. . . . Now, John Nevil, enact Drake and send me to join Thomas Doughty ! "

The Admiral answered not where he stood covering his eyes with his hand. " But Francis Sark," began Wynch in a shaking voice.

" I know naught of Francis Sark," Ferne replied. " As I have said so I did. I ask no other court than this, no further mercy than my present death. . . . John Nevil, for the sake of all that's dead and gone for ever, I pray you to keep me here no longer ! "

He staggered as he spoke and put his hand to his head. " Mortimer, Mortimer, Mortimer ! " cried the Admiral. " Oh, my God, let this dream pass ! "

" Why, the matter needs not God," said Ferne, and laughed. " I am a traitor, am I not ? Then do to me what was done to Thomas Doughty. Only hasten, for dead men wait to clutch me, and your looks do sear my very brain."

Again he reeled. With a cry Robin-a-dale sprang toward him. Arden, too, was there in time to support the sinking figure and guide it to the seat he had pushed forward. Some one held wine to the lips. . . . Slow moments passed, then Sir Mortimer's eyes

unclosed. The boy hung over him, and he smiled upon him, smiled with eye and lip. "Ay, ay, ay, Robin," he said, "we'll to the court! And sweep away these rhymes, for the queen of all my songs dwells there, and I shall look into her eyes—and that's better than singing, lad! Ay, I'll wear the violet, and we'll ride beneath the blossoms of the spring. . . . But there's a will-o'-the-wisp on the marsh out yonder, and here they call it a lost soul—the soul of the traitor Aguirre!"

"Master, master!" cried the boy.

Ferne laughed, touching the young cheek with long, supple fingers. "Fame is a bubble, lad—let me tell thee that! But then it is rainbow-hued and mirrors the sky—so we'll ride for the bubble, lad! and we'll stoop from the saddle and gather up Love! And when the bubble has vanished and Love is dead there's Honour left!" He leaned forward, seeing and hearing where was neither sound nor sight. There was gaiety in his face. To the men who stared upon him it was a fearful thing that he who had lost his battle should wear once more the look which they had seen a thousand times. He raised his hand.

"Do you not hear the drums beat and the

trumpets blow—far away, far away? Let me whisper—there's one that comes home in triumph. . . . Ay, your Grace, 'twas I that took Santo Domingo in Hispaniola, and on the main land the very rich cities of Puerto Cabello, Santa Marta, La Guayra, Cartagena, Nombre de Dios and San Juan D'Ulloa. Manoa I reserve—'tis a secret city, and all who know a secret must keep it, else. . . . Robin! Robin, rid me of these babblers. She's coming!—all in white—like blown spray—but she bears no roses. Lilies, lilies!—white samite like her robe—but her eyes are turned away. Let her pass, ye fools! She's the word of the night! He staggered to his feet, swaying forward, clutching at the empty air as at a man's throat, and again his laugh rang through the cabin. "So you twisted it from me, Spanish dog!—so I raved out my heart as to a woman? Then, Don Sathanas, we'll go home together and all the soldiery of hell shall not unlock our embrace!" He grappled with an invisible foe—bent him backward farther and farther over the brink of the world—went down with him into unplumbed darkness. . .

They judged not the Captain of the *Cygnet* for a craven and a traitor, for, day after day

and day after day, he lay in the Admiral's cabin, so ill a man that the coasts of Death seemed nearer than those of England, and man's condemnation an idle thing, seeing that so soon he must face another Justiciar. So near at times to that ultimate shore did he drift that those who watched him saw the shadow on his face. When the shadow was deep they waited with held breath; when it somewhat lifted they sorrowed that the tide had brought him back. He was of those changelings from a fortunate land to whom Love clings when Faith has covered her head and turned away. They that in heaviness of heart loved him still grieved that he might not touch the dark shore. Better, far better, to lay hold of it so, to go quietly in the not unhappy fever-dream, wandering of old days, recking naught of the new. So the matter might be adjudged elsewhere, but in this world glozed and softened.

The days went on and still Fate played with him, drew him forward, plucked him back. What fancies he had; what wild excursions he made into dizzy, black, and horror-haunted regions, what æons he lived beneath the seas that stifled, by what winds he was whirled, through space, past burning

orbs that neither warmed nor lighted the all-surrounding night ; in what Titanic maze he was lost, lost for ever, he and Pain that was his brother from whom he might not part ;—the sick brain made a hell and languished in the world it had created ! At other times, when the dark coasts were near and the current very swift, pale paradises opened to him where he lay for centuries, nor hot nor cold, neither waking nor sleeping, not in joy and not in sorrow. Then the stopped pendulum swung again, and the dreams came faster and faster. At times his brain turned from its mad clash with gigantic, formless, elemental things to rest in the beaten ways. They that listened heard the adventurer speak, heard the courtier and the poet and the lover, but never once the traitor. Of the fortress of Nueva Cordoba and of what had happened therein, of a Spaniard, noble but in name, of an English knight and leader who had not endured, who, where many a simple soul had stood fast to the end, had redeemed his body with his honour, the man who raved of all things else made no mention. Now with the sugared and fantastic protestation demanded by court fashion and the deep, chivalric loyalty of his type he spoke

to the Queen of England, and now he was with Sidney at Penshurst, Platonist, poet, Arcadian. Now he lived over old adventures, old voyages, past battles, wrongs done and wrongs received, unremembered loves and hatreds, and now he walked with Damaris Sedley in the garden of his ancient house at Ferne.

Then at last he came to a land where he lay and watched always a small round of azure wave and sky, lay idly with no need of thought or memory, until after a lifetime of the sapphire round it occurred to him to put forth a wasted hand, touch a sun-embrowned one, and whisper, "Robin!" It was a day later, the ships nearing the Grand Canary, and land birds flying past his circlet of sky and ocean, when, after lying in silence for an hour with a faint frown upon his brow, he at last remembered, and turned his face to the wall.

CHAPTER VIII

IN a small withdrawing-room at Whitehall an agreeable young gentleman pensioner, in love with his own voice, which was in truth mellifluous, read aloud to a knot of the Queen's ladies. The room looked upon the Park, and the pale autumn sunshine flooding it made the most of rich court raiment, purple hangings, green rushes on the floor, lengths of crimson velvet designed for a notable piece of arras, and kindled into flame the jewels upon white and flying fingers embroidering upon the velvet the history of King David and the wife of Uriah.

"'It is not the colour that commendeth a good painter,'" read the gentleman pensioner, "'but the good countenance; nor the cutting that valueth the diamond, but the virtue; nor the gloze of the tongue that trieth a friend, but the faith.'"

Mistress Damaris Sedley put the needle somewhat slowly through the velvet, her

fancy busy with other embroidery, not so much listening to the spoken words as pursuing in her mind a sweet and passionate rhetoric of her own.

"'Of a stranger I can bear much,'" went on the Lydian tones, "'for I know not his manners; of an enemy more, for that all proceedeth of malice; all things of a friend if it be but to try me, nothing if it be to betray me. I am of Scipio's mind, who had rather that Hannibal should eat his heart with salt than that Lælius should grieve it with unkindness; and of the like with Lælius, who chose rather to be slain with the Spaniards than suspected of Scipio.'"

Damaris quite left her work upon Bathsheba's long gold tresses and sat with idle hands, her level gaze upon nothing short of the great highway of the sea and certain ships thereon. Where now was the ship?—off what green island, what strange, rich shore?

On went the gentleman pensioner. "'I can better take a blister of a nettle than a prick of a rose; more willing that a raven should peck out my eyes than a dove. To die of the meat one liketh not is better than to surfeit of that he loveth; and I had

rather an enemy should bury me quick than a friend belie me when I am dead.' "

The reader made pause and received his due of soft plaudits. But Damaris dreamed on, the gold thread loose between her fingers. She was the fairest there, and the gentleman was piqued because she looked not at him, but at some fine Arachne web of her own weaving.

" Sweet Mistress Damaris——" he began ; and again, " Fair Mistress Damaris——" ; but Damaris was counting days and heard him not. A lesser beauty left her work upon King David's crown to laugh aloud, with some malice and some envy in her mirth. " Prithee, let her alone ! She will dream thus even in the presence. But I have a spell will make her awaken." She leaned forward and called " *Dione !* " then with renewed laughter sank back into her seat. " Lo ! you now——"

The maid of honour, who at her own name stirred not, at the name of a poet's giving had started from her dream with widened eyes and an exquisite blush. The startled face which for one moment she showed her laughing mates was of a beauty so intelligent and divine that, was it so she looked, a many

King Davids had found excuse for loving of Bathsheba. Then the inner light which had so informed every creature sought again its shrine, and Mistress Damaris Sedley, who was of a nature admirably poised and a wit most ready, lifted with the latest French shrug the jest from her own shoulders to those of another. "Oh, madam! was it you who spoke? Surely I thought it was your dead starling that you taught to call you by that name—but whose neck you wrung when it called it once too often!"

Having shot her forked shaft and come off victor, she smiled so sweetly upon the gentleman pensioner that for such ample thanks he had been reading still had she not risen, laid her work aside, and with a deep and graceful courtesy to the merry group left the room. When she was gone one sighed, and another laughed, and a third breathed, "O the heavens! to love and be loved like that!"

Damaris threaded the palace ways until she reached the chamber which she shared with a laughter-loving girl from her own countryside. Closed and darkened was the little room, but the maid of honour, moving to the window, drew the hangings and let the sunshine in. From a cabinet she took a

book in manuscript, then with it in her hands kneeled upon the window seat and looked out upon the Thames. She did not read what was written upon the leaves; those canzones and sonnets that were her love-letters were known to her by heart, but she liked to feel them in her hands while her gaze went down the river that had borne his ship out to sea. Where was now the ship? Like a white sea-bird her fancy followed it by day and by night, now here, now there, through storm and sunshine. It was of the dignity of her nature that she could look steadfastly upon the vision of it in storm or in battle. There were times when she was sure that it was in danger, when her every breath was a prayer, and there were times, as on this soft autumnal day, when her spirit drowsed in a languor of content, a sweet assurance of all love, all life to come. His words lay beneath her hand and in her heart; she pressed her brow against the glass, and as from a watch-tower looked out upon the earth, a fenced garden, and the sea a sure path and Time a strong ally speeding her lover's approach. For a long time she knelt thus, lapped in happy dreams; then the door opened, and in came her cham-

ber-fellow. "Damaris!" she said, and again, "Oh, Damaris, Damaris!"

Damaris arose from the window-seat and laid her love-letters away. "In trouble again, Cecily?" she asked; and her voice was like a caress, for the girl was younger than herself. "I know thy 'Oh, Damaris, Damaris!'" She closed the cabinet, then turning, put her arm round her fellow maid. "What is't, sweeting?"

Cecily slipped to her knees, hiding her face in the other's shimmering skirts. "Thou'rt so dear, so good, and so proud. . . . As soon as I might I ran hither, for every moment I feared to see thee enter! Thou wouldst have died hadst thou heard it there in that great ante-chamber, where they crowd and whisper and talk aloud—and some I know are glad. . . . The ships, Damaris—yesternight two of the ships came home."

She spoke incoherently, with sobbing breath, but gradually the form to which she clung had grown rigid in her embrace. "Two of the ships have come home," repeated Damaris. "Which came not home?"

"The *Cygnet* and the *Star*."

The maid of honour, unclasping the girl's hands, glided from her reach. "Let me

go, good Cis! Why, how stifling is the day!" She put her hand to her ruff, as though to loosen it, but the hand dropped again to her side. The silken coverlet upon the bed was awry; she went to it and laid it smooth with unhurried touch. From a bowl of late flowers crimson petals had fallen upon the table; she gathered them up, and going to the casement, gave them, one by one, to the winds outside.

"Damaris, Damaris, Damaris!" cried the frightened girl.

"Ay, I have heard him call me that," answered the other. "Sometimes Damaris, sometimes Dione. When did he die?"

"Oh, I bring no news of his death!" exclaimed Cicely. "Sir Mortimer Ferne is here—in London."

Damaris, swaying forward, caught at a heavy settle, sank to her knee, and laid her brow against the wood. Cecily, gazing down upon her, saw her cheek glow pure carnation, saw the quivering of the long eyelashes and the happy trembling of the lip. Presently the wave of colour fled; she unclosed her eyes, raised her head. "But there was something, was there not, to be borne? . . . God forgive me, I had forgot that I have abrother!"

Cecily, whose courage was ebbing, began to deal in evasions. "Indeed I know not as to thy brother. I am not sure . . . mayhap I did not hear him named. . . . They said so many things—all might not be true."

Damaris arose from the settle. "I will have thy meaning, Cis. 'They said so many things'—Who are 'they'?"

Cecily bit her lip, and dashed away fast-starting tears. "Oh, Damaris, all who have heard—all the court—his friends and thine and his foes. The matter's all abroad. The Queen hath letters from Sir John Nevil—he hath been sent for to the Privy Council——"

"Sir John Nevil hath been sent for. Why not Sir Mortimer Ferne? . . . Is he ill? Is he wounded?"

Cecily wrung her hands. "Now I must tell you. . . . It is his honour that doth suffer. There is a thing that he did— He hath confessed, or surely there were no believing . . . Damaris, they call him traitor. . . . Ah!"

"Ay, and I'll strike thee again an thou say that again!" cried Damaris.

The younger woman shrank before the angry eyes, the disdain of the smiling lips. Abruptly Damaris moved from the frightened

girl. Upon the wall, above a dressing-table, hung a Venetian mirror. The maid of honour looked at her image in the glass, then with flying fingers undid and laid aside her ruff, substituting for it a structure of cobweb lace, between whose filmy walls were displayed her white throat and bosom. Around her throat she clasped three rows of pearls, and also wound with pearls her dark-brown hair. Her eyes were very bright, but there was no colour in her face. Delicately, skilfully, she remedied this, until with shining eyes and with that false bloom upon her oval cheeks one would have sworn she was as joyous as she was fair.

Cecily, watching her with a beating heart, at last broke silence : " Oh, Damaris, whither are you going ? "

Damaris looked over her shoulder. " After a while I will be sorry that I struck thee, Cis. . . . I am going to talk with men." She clasped a gold chain about her slender waist, dashed scented water upon her hands, glanced at her full and sweeping skirts of green silk shot with silver. " I have broken my fan," she said, " wilt lend me thy great plumed one ? " Cecily brought the splendid toy. The maid of honour took it from her,

then, with a last glance at the mirror, swept towards the door, but on the threshold turned and came back for one moment to her chamber-fellow. "Forgive me, Cis," she said, and kissed the girl's wet cheek.

The great ante-room had its usual throng of courtiers, those of a day and those whose ghosts might come to haunt the floors that their mortal feet so oft had trodden. Men of note and worth were there, and men of no other significance than that wrought by rich apparel. Here men brought their dearest hopes and fears, and here they came to flaunt a feather or tell a traveller's tale. It was the place of deferred hopes and the place of poisoned tongues, and the place in which to suck the last sweet drop in an enemy's cup of trembling. It was the haunt of laughter and of fevered wit and of rivalry in all things, and here the heaviest of heart was not unlike to be the lightest of wit. The spirit of party never left its walls, and Ambition was its chamberlain. The envied and the envious walked there, and there hung the sword of Damocles and the invisible balances. Here, in one corner, might lord it one on whom Fortune broadly smiled, while around him buzzed the gilded para-

sites, and here, ten feet away, his rival felt the knife turn in his heart. To-morrow—to-morrow's old trick of legerdemain ! there the knife, here the smiling face, and for the cloud of sycophants mere change of venue. It was a land of air-castles and rainbow-gold, a fool's paradise and the garden where grew most thickly the apples of Sodom. In it were caged all greed, all extravagance, all jealousies, hopes, fears, passions that may be born of and destroy the soul of man, and within it also flamed splendid folly and fealty to some fixed star, and courage past disputing, and clear love of God and country. Yonder glass of fashion and mould of form had stood knee-deep in an Irish bog, keeping through a winter's night a pack of savages at bay ; this jester at a noble's elbow knew when to speak in earnest, and this, a suitor with no present in his hand, so lightly esteemed as scarce to seem an actor in the pageant, might to-night take his pen and give to after-time a priceless gift. Soldiers, idle gallants, gentlemen and officers of the court, men of law and men of affairs, churchmen, poets, foreigners, spendthrifts, gulls, satellites, and kinsmen of great lords, the wise, the foolish, the noble and the base—up and

down moved the restless brilliant throng. Some excitement was toward, for the great room buzzed with talk. The courtiers drew together in groups, and it seemed that a man's name was being bandied to and fro, dark shuttlecock to this painted throng. Damaris Sedley, entering the ante-chamber by a small side door, swam into the ken of a number of eager players gathered around a gentleman of flushed countenance, who, with much swiftness and dexterity, was wreaking old grudges upon the shuttlecock.

One of the audience trod upon the player's toe; each courtier bowed until his sword stood out a straight line of steel; the maid of honour curtsied, waved her fan, let her handkerchief fall to the floor. To seize the piece of lawn all entered the lists, for the lady was very beautiful, and of a seductive, fine, and subtle charm; a favourite also of the Queen, who, Narcissus-like, saw only her own beauty, and believed that Sir Mortimer Ferne's veiled divinity was rather to be found on Olympus than upon the plains beneath. In sheer loveliness, with lips like a pomegranate flower, mobile face of clear pallor, and beneath level brows eyes whose colour it was hard to guess at and whose depths

were past all sounding, Mistress Damaris Sedley held her small head high and went her graceful way, moving as one enchanted over the thorny floor of the court. She had great charm. Once it had been said beneath a royal commissioner's breath that here in this portionless girl was a twin sorceress to the Queen who dwelt at Tutbury.

Sorceress enough, at least, was she to draw to herself speech and thought of this particular group; to make those who were ignorant of her relation to the shuttlecock think less of the treasure of Spain than of the treasure which their eyes beheld, and those who had been his friends, who guessed at whom had been levelled those fair arrows of song, to start full cry (when they had noted that she was merry) upon other matters than lost ships and men. It was not long that she would have it so. "As I entered, sir, I heard you name the *Star*. That was one of Sir John Nevil's ships. Is there news of his adventure?"

The man to whom she spoke, some mere Hedon of the court, fluttered in the frank sunshine of her look. "Fair gentlewoman," he began, pomander-ball in hand, "had you a venture in that ship? Then the less beau-

teous Amphitrite hath played highwayman to your wealth. Now if I might, drawing from the storehouse of your smiles inveterate Courage, dub myself your Valour, and so to the rescue——"

"Oh, sir, at once I dismiss you to Amphitrite's court!" cried the lady. "Master Darrell"—to a dark-browed, saturnine personage—"tell me less of Amphitrite and more of the truth. The *Star*——"

He whom she addressed loved not the shuttlecock, thought one woman but falser than another, and made parade of blunt speech. Now a shrug of the shoulder accompanied his answer. "The *Star* went down months ago, off the Grand Canary, in a storm by night."

"Alack the day!" cried Damaris. "But God, not man, sendeth the storm! Was none saved?"

"All were saved," went on her grim informant; "but well for them had they died with their ship, in the salt sea—Captain Robert Baldry and his men——"

A murmur ran through the group, which now numbered more than one who could have shrewdly guessed to whom this lady had given her love. Some would have stayed

Black Darrell, but not the Queen herself could have bidden him on with more imperious gesture than did Damaris. "Saved from the sea—but better they had drowned! You speak in riddles, Master Darrell. Where are Captain Robert Baldry and his men?"

A young man hurriedly approached her from another quarter of the room. Men bowed low as he passed, and the circle about the maid of honour received him with a deference it scarce had shown to Beauty's self.

"Ha, Mistress Damaris!" he cried, with somewhat of a forced gaiety, "my sister sends messages to you from Wilton! The day is fair—wilt walk with me in the garden and hear her letter?"

The maid of honour gave him no answer; stood smiling, the plumed fan waving, her eyes fixed upon Black Darrell, who scorned to budge an inch for any court favourite and friend of the shuttlecock's. Damaris repeated her question, and he answered it with relish.

"Betrayed to the Spaniard, madam—they and many a goodly gentleman and tall fellow beside! If they died, they died with curses on their lips, and if they live, they

bide with the Holy Office or in the galleys of Spain."

He who had joined the group interrupted him sternly. "This, sir, is no speech for gentle ears. Madam, beseech you, come with me into the long walk."

The courage of a fighting race looked from the maid of honour's darkening eyes. The small head and slender, aching throat were held with pride, and the hand scarce trembled with which she waved Cecily's plumed fan. "I have a venture in this voyage," she said. "Certes, the value of a pearl necklace, and I will know if I am beggared of it! Moreover, dear Sir Philip, English courage and English tragedy do move me more than all the tangled woes of Arcadia. . . . Master Darrell, I have hopes of thy being no courtier, thou dost speak so to the point. Again, again—there were three ships, the *Mere Honour*, the *Marigold*, and the *Cygnet*——"

"They took a great galleon of Spain," said Black Darrell, "very rich, enough so to have paid your venture a hundred times over, lady, and they stormed a town, and might have taken a great castle, for they landed all their forces, of which Sir John Nevil made admirable disposition. But

there was an Achan in the camp, a betrayer high in place, who laid his body and his life in the balance against his honour. The Spanish guns mowed down the English; they fell into pits upon pointed stakes; Spanish horsemen rode them under. Meanwhile the *Cygnet*, traitorous as its Captain——"

"Traitorous as its Captain?" flamed the maid of honour. "But on, sir, on! Afterwards there will be accounting for so vile a falsehood!"

Another movement and murmur ran through the group, checked by Damaris' raised hand and burning eyes. "On, sir, on!"

Darrell shrugged. "Oh, madam, the *loyal Cygnet* would have it that that fair cockatrice the galleon was her own! So in flame and thunder they kissed, but now, quiet enough, they lie upon the sea-floor, they and the spilled treasure."

Damaris moistened her lips. "Where are the brave and gallant gentlemen who led this venture? Where is Sir John Nevil? Where is Sir Mortimer Ferne?"

Darrell would have answered blithe enough, but the man who had interfered now pushed the other aside, came close to the maid of

honour, and spoke with decision. "Gentlemen, this lady had a brother of much promise who sailed upon the *Cygnet*. . . . Ah! you perceive that such converse in her presence is not gentle or seemly." He took Damaris' hand; it was quite cold. "Sweet lady," he said, in a low voice, "come with me from out of this gallimaufry." He bent nearer, so that none but she could hear. "I will tell you all. It fits not with the dignity of your sorrow that you should remain here."

Damaris' bosom rose and fell in a long shuddering sigh. The room that was so large and bright swam before her, appeared to grow narrow, dark, and stifling. A hateful and terrible presence overshadowed her; it was as though she had but to put forth her hand to touch a coffin-lid. She no longer saw the forms about her, scarce felt the pressure of Sidney's hand, knew not, so brave a lady was she, so fixed her habit of the court, that she smiled upon the group she was leaving and swept them a formal curtsey. She found herself in the deserted outer gallery with Sidney—they were in the recess of a window, and he was speaking. She put her hand to her brow. "Is Henry Sedley dead?" she asked.

He answered her as simply: "Yes, lady, bravely dead—a good knight who rode steadfastly to that noblest Court, of which all earthly courts are but flawed copies."

As he spoke he regarded her anxiously, fearing a swoon or a cry, but instead she smiled, looking at him with dazed eyes, and her white hand yet at her forehead. "I am his only sister," she said, "and we have no father or mother or brother. We have been much together—all our lives—and we are tender of each other. . . . Death! I never thought that death could touch him; no, not upon this voyage.—There was one who swore to guard him."

Her companion made no answer, and she stood for a few moments without further word or motion, slowly remembering Darrell's words. Then a slight lifting of her head, a gradual stiffening of her frame; her hand fell, and the expression of her face changed—no speech, but parted lips, and eyes that at once appealed and commanded. She might have been some dark queen of a statelier world awaiting tidings that would make or mar. He was the most chivalric, the best-loved, spirit of his time, and his heart ached that, like his own Amphialus, he must deal

so sweet a soul so deadly a blow. Seeing that it must be so, he told quietly and with proper circumstance, not the wild exaggeration and tales of aforethought treason which rumour had caught up and flung into the court, but the story as Sir John Nevil had delivered it to the Privy Council. Even so, it was, inevitably, to this man and this woman, the story of one who had spoken where he should have bitten out his tongue; who, all unwillingly it might be, had yet betrayed his comrades, who had set a slur and a stain upon his order.

"He himself accuseth himself," ended the speaker, with a groan. "Avoweth that, wrung by their hellish torments, he made his honour of no account; prayeth for death."

Damaris stood upright against the mullioned window.

"Where is he?" she asked, and there was that in her voice which a man might not understand. He paused a moment as for consideration, then drew from his doublet a folded paper, gave it to her, and turned aside. The maid of honour, opening it, read—

To Sir Philip Sidney, Greeting:

Doubtless thou hast heard by now of how all

mischance and disaster befell the adventure. For myself who was thy friend, I will show thee in lines of thy own making what men hereafter (and justly) will say of me who am thy friend no longer :

" His deathbed peacock's folly,
His winding-sheet is shame.
His will, false seeming wholly,
His sole executor blame."

Lo ! I have given space enough to a coward's epitaph. Of our friendship of old I will speak no farther than to cry to its fleeing shadow for one last favour—then all's past.

I wish to have speech, alone, with Mistress Damaris Sedley. It must be quickly, for I know not what the Queen's disposition of me may be. For God's sake, Philip Sidney, get me this ! I am not yet under arrest—I am hard by the Palace, at the Bell Inn.—You may effect it if you will. God knows you have a silver tongue and she a heart of gold ! I trust her to give me speech with her as I trust you to find the way.

Time was, thy friend ; time is, thy suppliant only.

MORTIMER FERNE.

O Sidney, Sidney ! I am not altogether base !

The maid of honour folded the letter, keeping it, however, in her hand. Her companion, turning toward her, chanced to see her face of sombre horror, of wide, tearless eyes, and would look no more. To themselves the two were modern of the moderns, ranked in the forefront of the present; courtier, statesman, and poet of the day, exquisite maid of honour whose every hour convention governed; yet the face upon which in one revealing moment he had gazed seemed not less old than the face of Helen—of Medea—of Ariadne; not less old and not less imperishably beautiful. Neither spoke of her idyll turned to a crowder's song. Knowing that there were no words which she could bear, he waited, his mind filled with deep pity, hers with God knows what complexity, what singleness of feeling, until at last a low sound—no intelligible word—came from her throat. The plumed fan dropped the length of its silken cord, and her hands went out for help that should yet be voiceless, assuming everything, expressing nothing. He met her call, as a few years later he met, at Zutphen, the agony of envy, the appeal against intolerable thirst, in the eyes of a common soldier.

"No command concerning him has yet been

given," he said, gently. "I sent him mask and cloak—he came by yonder way—met me here. . . . There were few words. . . . His humour is that of glancing steel."

"That is as it should be," answered the maid of honour.

Her companion parted the hangings which separated the two from the gallery. "He awaits behind yonder door where stands the boy." Ceremoniously he took her hand and led her to an entrance beside which leaned a slender lad in a ragged blue jerkin and hose. "Robin, you will watch yonder at the great doors. Sweet lady, I stand here, and none shall enter. But remember that the time is short—at any moment the gallery may fill."

"There is no long time needed," said Damaris. In her voice there was no anger nor shame nor poignant grief, but she spoke as in a dream, and her face when she turned it toward him was strange once more, like the face of Fatal Love rising clear from the crash of its universe. She had drunk the half of a bitter cup, and the remainder she must drink; but when all was said, she was going, after weary months, to see the face of the man she loved. Philip Sidney lifted the

latch of the door, saw her enter, and let it fall behind her.

The room in which she found herself was ruddy with firelight, the flames colouring the marble chimney-piece and causing faint shadows to chase one another across an arras embroidered with a hunting scene. Upon a heavy table were thrown a cloak and mask.

The man who had worn them turned from the window, came forward a few paces, and stood still. Damaris put forth her hand, and leaned for strength against the chimney-piece—a beautiful woman in the heart of the glow of the fire. At first she said no word, for she was thinking dully. "If he comes no nearer, it must be true. If he crosses not the shadow on the floor between us, it must be true." At last she asked, in a low voice—

"Is it true?"

In the profound silence that followed she made a step forward out of the red glow toward the bar of shadow. Ferne stayed her with a gesture of his hand.

"Yes, it is true," he said. "It is true, unless, indeed, there be no answer to Pilate's 'What is truth?' For myself, I walk in a whirling world and a darkness shot with fire. Did I do this thing? Yea, verily, I

did! Then, seeing that I dwell not in Edmund Spenser's faery-land nor believe that an enchanter's wand may make white seem black and black seem white, I now see myself nakedly, as I am—a man who knew not himself; a sword, jewel-hilted, with a blade of lath; a gay masker whom, his vizard torn away, the servants thrust forth into the cold! I am my own assassin, forger, abhorred fool!"

He paused, and the embers fell, growing grey in the silence. At last he spoke again, in a changed voice. "Thy brother, lady. . . . There will not lack those to tell thee that I tripped him with my foot, that I slew him with my dagger. It is not true, and yet I count myself his murderer. . . . See the shadow at thy feet, the heavy shadow that lies between you and me! . . . How may I say that I would have given my life for him who was thy brother and my charge, whom for his own sake I loved, when I gave not my life, when I bought my life with his and many another's? . . . Thou dost well to say no word, but I wouldst that thou didst not press thy hands against thy heart, nor look at me with those eyes. A little longer and I will let thee go, and Sidney's sister will comfort thee and be kind to thee."

"What else?" said Damaris, beneath her breath. "What else? O God! no more!"

Ferne drew from his doublet a knot of soiled ribbon. Again he was speaking, but not with the voice he had used before. "Thy favour. . . . I have brought it back to thee —but not stainless, not worn in triumph. . . . There is a fortress and a town that I see sometimes in a dream, and the governor of them both is a nobleman of Spain—Don Luiz de Guardiola, Governor of Nueva Cordoba. He filched from me my honour, but left me life that I might taste death in life. He set me on the river sands that I might call to the ships I had not sunken and to the comrades I had not slain. He gave me back my sword that in the cabin of the *Mere Honour*, in my leader's presence, I might break the blade in twain. He restored me *this* when he had ground it beneath his heel!—No, no, I will not have you speak! But was he not a subtle gentleman? . . . Now, by your leave, I shall burn the ribbon."

He crossed to the great fireplace and threw the length of velvet ribbon into a glowing hollow. It caught and blazed and illuminated his face. Damaris moved also, groping with her hands for the chair beside

the table. Finding it, she sank down, outstretched her arms upon the board, and bowed her head upon them. Through the faintness and the leaden horror that weighed her down she heard Ferne's voice, at first yet monotonous and low, at the last an irrepressible cry of passion.

"Now there is no longer troth between us, and all thy days, by summer and by winter, thou mayst listen unabashed to tales of such as I. If I am named to thee, thou needst not blush, for now I have seared away that eve above the river, that morn at Penshurst. And there will be no more singing, and men will soon forget, as thou too—as thou too must forget! I loved; I loved; but to thy lips and thy dark, dark eyes, and thy whole sweet self I say farewell. . . . Farewell!

She was aware of his step beside her; knew that he had lifted the cloak and mask from the table; thought that but for this all-enfolding heaviness she would speak. . . . The door opened, and Sidney's voice reached her in a low, peremptory "At once!" A pause that seemed filled with labouring breath, then footsteps passed her; the door closed. Alone, she rose to her feet, stood for a moment with her hands at her temples,

then moved with an uncertain step to the fire, where she sank down upon the rushes and tried to warm herself. Something among the ashes drew her attention. In went her hand, and out came a charred end of velvet ribbon.

She sat before the fire for some time, dully conscious of sound and movement in the gallery without, but caring nothing. When at last she arose and left the room all was quiet enough, and she reached her own chamber unmolested. Toward evening Cecily, fluttering in after long hours of attendance, found her in her night-rail, half kneeling beside the bed, half fallen upon the floor. . . . The Countess of Pembroke was not at court, and there was none beside whom Cecily cared or dared to call; so, terrified, she watched out the night beside a Damaris she had never known.

Philip Sidney's low voice had been urgent, and the man who owed to him a perilous assignation made no tarrying. With his cloak drawn about his face and his hand busy with the small black mask, he passed swiftly along the gallery towards the door through which he had obtained entrance and

where Sidney now waited with an anxious brow. It was too late. Suddenly before him, at the head of a short flight of stairs, the massive leaves of the great doors swung open and halberdiers appeared—beyond them a confused yet stately approach of sound and colour and indistinguishable forms. The halberdiers advanced, a double line forming an aisle for the passage of some brilliant throng, and cutting off the door of escape. Ferne looked over his shoulder. From doors now opened at the farther end of the gallery people were entering, were ranging themselves along the walls. There was a glimpse of a crowd without ; beyond them, the palace stairs and the silver Thames. A trumpet blew, and the crowd shouted, *God save the Queen !*

The tide of colour rolled through the great inner doors, down the level of the gallery, and so on toward the river and the waiting barges. It caught upon its crest Philip Sidney, who, striving in vain to make his way back to where Ferne was standing, had received from the latter a most passionate and vehement gesture of dissuasion. On came the bright wave, with menace of discomfiture and shame, toward the man who,

surrounded though he was by petty courtiers, citizens, and country knights, could hardly fail of recognition. Impossible now was his disguise, where every hat was off, where a velvet cloak swung from a shoulder was one thing, and a mantle of frieze quite another. He dropped the latter at his feet, crushed the light mask in his hand, and waited.

It was not for long. Down upon him swept the cortège—the heart of the court of a virgin queen. At once keenly and as in a dream he viewed it. Not less withdrawn was it now than a fairy pageant clear cut against rosy skies and watched by him from the stony bases of inaccessible cliffs—and yet it was familiar, goodly, his old accustomed company. This face—and that—and that! how he startled from it laughter or indifference or vagrant thought. There were low exclamations, a woman's slight scream, pause, confusion, and from the rear an authoritative voice demanding reason for the delay. Past him, staring and murmuring, swept the peacock-tinted vanguard, then, Burleigh on one hand, Leicester on the other, encompassed and followed by the greatest names and the fairest faces of England, herself erect, ablaze

with jewels, conscious of her power and at all times ready to wield it, came the daughter of Henry the Eighth.

A noble presence moving in the full lustre of sovereignty, a princess who, despite all womanish faults, was a wise king unto her people, a maiden ruler to whom in that aftermath of chivalry men gave a personal regard, rose-coloured and fanciful; the woman not above coquetry, vanity, and double-dealing, the monarch whose hand was heavy upon the council board, whose will perverted law, whose prime wish was the welfare of her people—she drew near to the man whom she had shown fair promise of settled favour, but to whose story, told by his Admiral and commented upon by those about her, she had that day listened between bursts of her great oaths and with an ominous flashing of jewels upon her hands.

Now her quick glance singled him out from the lesser folk with whom he stood. She coloured sharply, took two or three impetuous steps, then, indignant, stayed with her lifted hand the progress of her train. Ferne knelt. In the sudden silence Elizabeth's voice, shaken with anger, made itself heard through half the length of the gallery.

"What make you here? Who has dared to do this—to place this man here?"

"Myself alone, madam," answered quickly the man at her feet. With a motion of his hand he indicated the long cloak beside him. "I had but made entrance into the gallery—I was taken unawares——"

"Hast a knife beneath your cloak?" burst forth the Queen. "I hear that right royally you gave my subjects' lives to the Spaniard. There's a death that would more greatly please those that mastered you! . . . Answer me!"

"I have no words," said Ferne, in a low voice. As he spoke he raised his head and looked Majesty in the face.

Again Elizabeth coloured, and her jewels shook and sparkled. "If not that, what then?" she cried. "God's death! Is't the Spanish fashion to wear disgrace as a favour? Again, sir, what do you here?"

"I came as a ghost might come," answered Ferne. "Thinks not, your Grace, that the spirits of disgraced and banished men, or men whose fault, mayhap, brought forfeiture of their lives, may strain to make return to that spot where they felt no guilt, where they were greatly happy? As such an one might

come and no man see him, hurt, or be hurt of him, so came I, restless, a thing of naught, a shade drawn to look once more upon old ways, old walls, the place where once I freely walked. None brought me; none stayed me, for am I not a ghost? I only grieve that your Grace's clear eyes should have marked this shade of what I was, for most unwittingly I, uncommanded, find myself in your Grace's presence." He bent lower, touched the hem of her magnificent robe, and his voice, which had been quite even and passionless, changed in tone. "For the rest —whether I am yet to hold myself at your Grace's pleasure, or whether you give me sentence now—God save your Majesty and prevent your enemies at home and abroad—God bring downfall and confusion upon the Spaniard and all traitors who abet him—God save Queen Elizabeth!"

There followed a pause, during which could be heard the murmur of the waiting throng and the autumnal rustle of the trees without the gallery. At last——

"Yours was ever an eloquent tongue, Sir Mortimer Ferne," said the Queen, slowly. "Hadst thou known when to hold it, much might have been different. . . . Thy father served us well, and once we slept at his

ancient house of Ferne, rich only in the valour and loyal deeds of its masters, from old times until our own. . . . What is lost is lost, and other and greater matters clamour for our attention. Go! hold thyself a prisoner, at our pleasure, in thy house of Ferne! If thou art but a shade with other shadows, then seek the company of thy dead father and of other loyal and gallant gentlemen of thy name. Perchance, one and all, they would have blenched had the pinch but been severe enough. I have heard of common men—ay, of thieves and murderers—whose lips the rack could not unlock! It seems that our English knights grow less resolved. . . . My lords, the sun is declining. If we would take the water to-day, we must make no further tarrying. Your hand, my lord of Leicester."

Once more her train put itself into motion. Lords and ladies, lips that smiled and hearts all busy with the next link in Ambition's golden chain, on they swept into the pleasant outer air. The one man of the motley throng of suitors to whom Elizabeth had spoken rose from his knee, picked up his frieze coat, and turned a face that might have gone unrecognized of friend or foe toward the door by which he had entered the gallery.

CHAPTER IX

GILES ARDEN, having ridden far as required the tale of miles from the tavern of the *Triple Tun*, came, upon a sunshiny afternoon of early spring, to an oak knoll where one might halt to admire a fair picture of an old house set in old gardens. Old were the trees that shadowed it, and ivy darkened all its walls; without sound a listless beauty breathed beneath the pale blue skies; for all the sunshine and the bourgeoning of the spring, the picture seemed but sombrely rich but sadly sweet. To the lips of a light-of-heart there was that in its quality had brought a sigh: as for Arden, when he had checked his horse he looked upon the scene with a groan, then presently for very mirthlessness, laughed.

"That day," he said to himself with a grimace—"that day when we forsook our hawking, and dismounting on this knoll, planned for him his new house! There should be the front, there the tower, there

the great room where the Queen should lie when she made progress through these ways! All to be built when, like a tiercel-gentle to his wrist, came more fame, more gold!"

The speaker turned in his saddle and looked about him with a rueful smile.

"I on yonder mossy stone, and Sidney, chin in hand, full length beneath that oak, and he standing there, his arm about the neck of his grey! And what says monsieur the traitor? 'I like it well as it stands, nor will I tear down what my forefathers built. Plain honour and plain truth are the walls thereof, and encompassed by them, the Queen's Grace may lie down with pride.' Brave words, traitor! Gulls, gulls (saith the world), friend Sidney! For a modicum of thy judgment, Solomon, King of Jewry, I would give (and he would bestow it upon me) my cousin the Earl's great ruby!"

He laughed again, then sighed, and gathering up his reins, left the little eminence and trotted on through sun and shade to a vacant ruinous lodge and a twilit avenue, silent and sad beneath the heavy interlacing of leafy boughs. Closing the vista rose a squat doorway, ivy-hung; and tumbled upon the grass beside it, attacking now a great book

and now a russet pippin, lay a lad in a blue jerkin.

At the sound of the horse's hoofs the reader marked his page with his apple, and with a single movement of his lithe body was on his feet, astare to see a visitor where for many days visitors had been none. Declining autumn and snowy winter and greening spring, he could count upon the fingers of one hand the number of those who had come that way where once there had been gay travelling beneath the locked elms. Another moment and he was at Arden's side, clinging to that gentleman's jack-boot, raising to his hard-favoured but not unkindly countenance a face aflame with relief and eagerness. Presently came the big tears to his eyes, he swallowed hard, and ended by burying his head in the folds of the visitor's riding-cloak.

"Where is your master, Robin-a-dale?" Arden demanded.

The boy, now red and shamefaced because of his wet lashes, stood up, and squaring himself, looked before him with winking eyes, nor would answer until he could speak without a quaver. Then: "He sits in the north chamber, Master Arden. This side

o' the house the sun shines." Despite his boyish will the tears again filled his eyes. "'Tis May-time now, and there's been none but him above the salt since Lammas-tide. Sir John came and Sir Philip came, but he would not let them stay. 'Tis lonesome now at Ferne House, and old Humphrey and I be all that serve him. Of nights a man is a'most afeard. . . . I'll fasten your horse, sir, and mayhap you'll have other luck."

Arden dismounted, and presently the two, boy and adventurer, passed into a hall where the latter's spur rang upon the stone flooring, and thence into a long room, cold and shadowy, with the light stealing in through deep windows past screens of fir and yew. Touched by this wan effulgence, beside an oaken table on which was not wine nor dice nor books, a man sat and looked with strained eyes at the irrevocable past.

"Master, master!" cried Robin-a-dale. "Here be company at last. Master!"

Sir Mortimer passed his hand across brow and eyes as though to brush away thick cobwebs. "Is it you, Giles Arden?" he asked. "It was told me, or I dreamed it, that you were in Ireland."

"I was, may God and St. George forgive me!" Arden answered, with determined lightness. "Little to be got and hard in the getting! Even the Muses were not bountiful, for my men and I well-nigh ate Edmund Spenser out of Kilcolman. He sends you greeting, Mortimer; swears he is no jealous poet, and begs you to take up that old scheme which he forsook of King Arthur and his Knights——"

"He is kind," said Ferne slowly. "I am well fitted to write of old, heroic deeds. Nor is there any doubt that the man-at-arms who hath lost his uses in the struggle of this world should take delight in quiet exile, sating his soul with the pomp of dead centuries."

"Nor he nor I meant offence," began Arden hastily.

"I know you did not," the other answered. "I have grown churlish of late. Robin! a stirrup-cup for Master Arden!"

A silence followed, then said Arden. "And if I want it not, Mortimer? And if, old memories stirring, I have ridden from London to Ferne House that I might see how thou wert faring?"

"Thou seest," said Ferne.

"I see how bitterly thou art changed."

"Ay, I am changed," answered Sir Mortimer. "Your thought was kindly, and I thank you for it. Once these doors opened wide to all who knocked, but it is not so now. Ride on to the town below the hill, and take your rest in the inn! Your bedfellow may be Iscariot, but if you know him not, and as yet he knows himself but slenderly, you may sleep without dreaming. Ride on!"

"The inn is full," answered Arden bluntly. "This week the Queen rests in her progress with your neighbour, the Earl, and the town will be crowded with mummers and players, grooms, cutpurses, quacksalvers, and cockatrices, travellers and courtiers whom the north wind hath nipped! S'blood, Mortimer, I had rather sleep in this grave old place."

"With Judas who knows himself at last?" asked Ferne coldly, without moving from his place. The door opened, and old Humphrey, shuffling across the floor to the table, placed thereon a dish of cakes and a great tankard of sack, then as he turned away cast a backward glance upon his master's face. Arden noted the look, that

there was in it fear, overmastering ancient kindness, and withal a curiosity as ignoble as it was keen. Suddenly, as though the fire of that knowledge had leaped to his own heart from that of his host, he knew in every fibre how intolerable was the case of the master of the house, sitting alone in this gloomy chamber, served by this frightened boy, by that old man whose gaze was ever greedy for the quiver of an eyelid, the pressing together of white lips, whose coarse and prying hand ever strayed toward the unhealed sore. He strode to the table and laid hands upon the tankard. "The dust of the road is in my throat," he explained, and drank deeply of the wine, then put the tankard down and turned to the figure yet standing in the cold light as in an atmosphere all its own.

"Mortimer Ferne," he said, "I came here as thy aforetime friend. I will not believe that it is my stirrup-cup that I have drunk."

"Ay, your stirrup-cup," answered the other steadily. "Nowadays I see no company—my aforetime friend."

"That word was ill chosen," began Arden hastily. "I meant not——"

"I care not what you meant," said Sir Mortimer; and sitting down at the table, shaded his eyes with his hand. "Of all my needs the least is now a friend. Go your ways to the town and be merry there, forgetting this limbo and me, who wander to and fro in its shadows." Suddenly he struck his hand with force against the table and started to his feet, pushing from him with a grating sound the heavy oaken settle. "Go!" he cried. "The players and mummers are there. Go sit upon the stage, and in the middle of the play cry to your neighbours: 'These be no actors! Why, once I knew a man who could so mask it that he deceived himself!' There are quacksalvers who will sell you anything. Go buy some ointment, for your eyes will show you the coiled serpent at the bottom of a man's heart! Travellers! — ask them if Prester John can see the canker where the fruit seems fairest. Nipped courtiers! laugh with them at one against whom blow all the winds of hell, blast after blast, driving his soul before them! Ballad-mongers——"

He paused, laughed, then beckoned to him Robin-a-dale. "Sirrah," he said, "Master Arden ever loved a good song.

Now sing him the ballad we heard when the devil drove us to town last Wednesday."

"I—I have forgotten it, master," answered the boy, and cowered against the wall.

"You lie!" cried Ferne, and the table shook again beneath his hand. "Did I not exercise you in it until you were perfect? Sing!"

The boy opened his mouth and there came forth a heart-broken sound. His master stamped upon the floor. "Shall I not also torture where I can? Sing, Robin, my man! Fling back your head and sing like the lark in the sky! What! am I fallen so low that my very page flouts me, kicks obedience out-of-doors?"

Robin-a-dale straightened himself and began to sing, with bravado, a fierce red in his cheeks, and his young voice high and clear—

"Now list to me, ladies, and list to me, gentles;
I've a story for your ears of a false, false knight
Whom England held in honour, but he treasured Spain so dearly
That he sold into her hands his comrades in fight.

"'Twas before a walled city with the palm-trees hanging over;

He was Captain of the *Cygnet*, and it sank before his eyes;
The Englishmen ashore, they're taken in the pitfall,
Good lack! they toil in galleys or their souls to God arise.

"He sees them in his sleep, the craven and the traitor.
The sea it keeps their bones, their bloody ghosts they pass——"

"For God's sake!" cried Arden; and the boy, snatching with despairing haste at the interruption, ceased his singing, and in the heavy silence that followed crept nearer and nearer to his master until he touched a listless hand.

"Ay, Robin," said Ferne absently, and laid the hand upon his head. "And the bloody ghosts they pass."

Arden spoke with emotion: "All men when their final account is made up may have sights to see that now they dream not of. Thou art both too much and too little fairly in these shadows. I know that Philip Sidney and John Nevil have come to Ferne House, and here am I, thy oldest comrade of them all. A sheet of paper close written with record of noble deeds becomes not worthless because of one deep blot."

Ferne, his burst of passion past, arose and moved from table to window, from window to great chimney-piece. There was that in the quiet, almost stealthy regularity of his motions that gave subtle suggestion of days and nights spent in pacing to and fro, to and fro, this deep-windowed room.

At last he spoke, pausing by the fireless hearth: "I say not that it is so, nor that there is not One who may read the writing beneath the blot. But from the time of Cain to the present hour if the blotted sheet be bound with the spotless the book is little esteemed."

"Cain slew his brother wilfully," said Arden.

"That also is told us," answered the other. "Jealousy constrained him, while constancy of soul was lacking unto me. I know not if it was but taken from me for a time, or if, despite all seeming, I never did possess it. I know that the dead are dead, and I know not to what ambuscade I, their leader, sent them. . . . I fell, not wilfully, but through lack of will. Now, an the Godhead within me be not flown, I will recover myself—but never what is past and gone, never the dead flowers, never

the souls I set loose, never one hour's eternal scar! . . . Enough of this. Ride on to the inn, for Ferne House keepeth guests no longer. To-morrow, an you choose, come again, and we will say farewell. Why, old school-fellow! thou seest I am sane—no hermit or madman, as the clowns of this region would have me. But will you go—will you go?"

"It seems that you yourself journey to the town upon occasion," said Arden. "Ride with me now, Mortimer. No country lass more sweet than the air to-day!"

The other shook his head. "Business has taken me there. But now that I have sold this house I at present go no more."

"Sold this house!" echoed Arden, and with a more and more perturbed countenance began to pace the floor. "I did never think to hear of Ferne House fallen to strange hands! Your father——" He paused before a picture set in the panelled wall. "Your father loved it well."

"My father was of pure gold," said Sir Mortimer, "but I, his son, am of iron, or what baser metal there may be. Now I go forth to my kind."

"Oh! in God's name, leave Plato alone!"

cried the other. "'Tis not by that pagan's advice that you divest yourself of house and land!"

"I wanted money," said Ferne dully.

The man whom ancient friendship had brought that way stopped short in his pacing to gaze upon the figure standing in the light of the high window. For what could such an one want money? Courtier, no more for ever; patron of letters, friend of wise men, no more for ever; soldier and sea-king, comrade and leader of brave men never, never again—what wanted he so much, what other was his imperative need than this old, quiet house sunk in the shadows of its age-old trees, grave with a certain solemnity, touched upon with tragedy, attuned to a sorrowful patience? For a moment the room and the man who made its core were blurred to Arden's vision. He walked to the window and stood there, twirling his mustachios, finally humming to himself the lines of a song.

"That is Sidney's," said Ferne quietly. "I hear that he does the Queen noble service. . . . Well, even in the old times he was ever a length before me!"

"Why do you need money?" demanded

the visitor. "What more retired — what better house than this?"

The man who leaned against the chimney-piece turned to gaze at his visitor with that which had not before showed in mien or words. It was wonder, slight and mournful, yet wonder. "Of course you also would think that," he said at last. "Even Robin thinks that the stained blade should rust in its scabbard—that here I should await my time, training the rose-bushes in my garden, listening to the sere leaves fall, singing of other men's harvests."

The boy cried out: "I don't, I don't! You've promised to take me with you!" and flung himself down upon the pavement, with his head beside his master's knee.

"I have bought me a ship," said Ferne, "together with a crew of beggared mariners and cast soldiers. I think they be all villains and desperate folk, or they would not sail with me. Some that seemed honest have fallen away since they knew the name of their captain. . . . We must begone, Robin! if we would not sail the ship ourselves we must begone, we must begone."

"Begone where?" demanded Arden, and wheeled from the window.

"To fight the Spaniard," said Ferne. "The Queen hath been my very good mistress. John Nevil and Sidney have procured me leave to go—if it so be that I go quietly. I think that I will not return—and England will forget me, but Spain may remember. . . . For the rest, I go to search for Robert Baldry; to seek if not to find my enemy, the foe that I held in contempt, whom in my heart I despised because he was not poet and courtier as I was, nor knight and gentleman as I was, nor very wise as I was, and because all his vision was clouded and gross, while I—I might see the very flower o' the sun. . . . Well, he was a brave man."

"He is dead," whispered Arden. "Surely he is dead."

"Maybe," answered the other. "But I nor no man else saw him die. And we know that these Spanish tombs do sometimes open and give up the dead. I'll throw for size-ace."

"If he lived they would have sent him to Cartagena—to the Holy Office!" cried the other. "One ship—a scoundrel crew. . . . Mortimer, Mortimer, some other ordeal than that!"

Ferne raised his eyes. "I call it by no such fine name," he said. "I but know that if he yet lives, then he and what other Englishmen are left alive do cry out for deliverance, looking toward the sea, thinking, 'Where is now a friend?'" He left the table and came near to Arden. "'Twas a kindly impulse sent you here, old comrade of mine; but now will you go? The dead and I hold Ferne House of nights. To-morrow come again and say good-bye."

"I will sail with you to the Indies, Mortimer," said the visitor.

There was silence in the room; then, "No, no," answered Ferne, in a strange voice. "No, no."

Arden persisted, speaking rapidly, carrying it off with sufficient lightness. "He was just home from Ireland and stood in need of the sun. His cousin wanted him not; John Nevil was in the north and had helpers enough. The slaying of Spaniards was at once good service and good sport. Best take him along for old time's sake. Indeed, he asked no better than to go——" On and on he talked, until, looking up, his speech was cut short by the aspect of the man before him.

If in every generation the house of Ferne, father and son, could wear a dark face when occasion warranted, certainly in this moment that of the latest of his race was dark indeed. "And at the first pinch be betrayed. Awake, or here, or there, in the torments of Spain or in another world! Awake and curse me by all your gods! Speak not to me—I am not hungry for a friend! I have no faith to pledge against your trust! The rabble which await me upon my ship, I have bought them with my gold, and they know me, who I am. For Robin—God help the boy! He had a fever, and he would not cease his cries until I sware not to part from him. Robin, Robin! Master Arden will take horse! Go, Arden, go! or as God lives I will strike you where you stand. No—no hand-touching! Can you not see that you heat the iron past all bearing? A moment since and I could have sworn I saw behind you Henry Sedley! Go, go!"

He sank upon the settle beneath the window, and buried his head in his arms. For a long minute Arden stood with a drawn face, then turning, left the house and left the place, for the knowledge was borne in upon him that here and now friendship

could give no aid. When, half an hour later, he arrived at the *Blue Swan* in the neighbouring town and called for *aqua vitæ*, mine host, jolly and round and given over to facetiousness, swore that to look so white and bewitched-like the gentleman must have gathered mandrakes from Ferne churchyard, or have dined with the traitor knight himself.

That same afternoon, when the rays of the sun were lower, Ferne went into his garden and lifted his bared brow, that perchance the air might cool it. It was the quiet hour when the goal of the sun is in view, and the shadows of the fruit trees lay long upon the grass. There were breaches in the garden walls where they had crumbled into ruin, and through these openings, beyond dark masses of all-covering ivy, sight might be had of old trees set in alleys, of primrose-yellowed downs, and of a distant cliff-head where sheep grazed, while far below gleamed a sapphire line of sea. Tender quiet, fair stillness, marked the spot. Day mused as she was going: Evening, drawing near, held her finger to her lips. A tall flower, keeping fairy guard beside three

ruinous steps, moved not her slightest bell, but there came one note of a hidden thrush.

Full in the midst of a grass-plot was set a semicircular bench of stone. To this Ferne moved, threw himself down, and with a moaning sigh closed his eyes. There had been long days and sleepless nights; there had been, once his brain had ceased to whirl, the growth of a purpose slowly formed, then held like iron; there had been the humble pleading for freedom, the long delay, the hope deferred; then, his petition granted, the going forth to mart and highway, the bargaining, amidst curious traffickers, or that rotting ship, for those lives, as worthless as his own, which yet must have their price. This going forth was very bad; like hot lead within the gaping wound, like searing sunshine upon the naked eye. And now, to-day, not an hour since, Arden! to mock, to goad, to torture——

Slowly, slowly, the sun went down the west, and the peace of the garden deepened. Very stealthily the quiet stole upon him; softly, silently, with spirit touch, it brought him healing simples. Utterly weary as he was, the balm of the hour at last flowed over him, faintly soothing, faintly caressing.

He opened his eyes, and breathing deeply, looked about him with a saner vision than he had used of late.

The lily by the broken stair slept on, but the thrush sang once again. The bell-like note died into the charmed stillness, and all things were as they had been. Thirty paces away, stark against the evening sky, rose the western wall of Ferne House, and it was shaggy with ivy that was rooted like a tree, wide-branched, populous with birds' nests, and high, high against the blue a thing of tenderest sprays and palest leaves. The long ridge of them kept the late sunshine, and so far was it lifted above the earth, so still in that dreamy hour, so touched with pale gold, so distant and so delicate against high heaven, that it caught and held eye and soul of the man for whom Fate had borrowed Ixion's wheel. He gazed until the poet in him sighed with pure pleasure; then came forgetfulness; then, presently, he looked into his heart and began to make a little song, amorous, quaint, and honey-sweet, just such a song as in that full dawn of poesy Englishmen struck from the lyre and thought naught of it. His lips did not move; had he spoken, at

the sound of his own voice the charm had cracked, the little lyric had shrunk away before tragedy that was yet as fierce as it was profound, that had as yet few other notes than those of primal pain.

With the final cadence, the last sugared word, the ivy sprays somewhat darkened against the eastern sky. His fancy being yet aloft, he turned that he might behold the light upon the downs, and then he saw Damaris Sedley where she stood upon the lowest of the ruined steps, stiller than the flower beside her, and with something rich and strange in her bearing and her dress. Cloth of silver sheathed her body, while the flowing sleeves that half revealed, half hid her white and rounded arms were of silver tissue over watchet blue, and of watchet was the mantle which she had let fall upon the step beside her. A net of wire of gold crossing her hair, that was but half confined, held high above her forehead a golden star. In one hand she bore a silvered spear well tipped with gold, the other she pressed above her heart. Her face was pale and grave, her scarlet lip between her teeth, her dark eyes intent upon the man before her.

Ferne sprang to his feet and started forward, very white, his arm outstretched and trembling, crying to her if she were spirit merely. She shook her head, regarding him gravely, her hand yet upon her heart. "I attend the Queen upon her progress," she said. "This day at the Earl's there is a great masque of Dian and her huntresses, satyrs, fauns, all manner of sylvan folk. At last I might steal aside unmissed. . . . By the favour of a friend I rode here through the quiet lanes, for I wished to see you face to face, to speak to you—to you who gave me no answer when I wrote, and wrote again! . . . I am weary with the joys of this day. May I rest upon yonder seat?"

He moved backward before her, slowly, across the grass-plot to the bench of stone, and she followed him. Their gaze met the while. There was no wonder in his look, no consciousness of self in hers. In the spaces beyond life their souls might meet thus; each drawing by the veil, each recognizing the other for what it was. They took their seat upon the wide stone bench, with the primroses at their feet, and above them the empurpling arch of the sky. Throughout the past months, when he

dreamed of her, when he thought of her, he bowed himself before her, he raised not his eyes to hers. But now their looks met, and his countenance of a haggard and ravaged beauty did not change before her still regard. The floating silver gauze of her open sleeve lying upon the stone between them he lightly, with no pressure that she might notice, let rest his hand upon it. In the act of doing this he wondered at himself, but then he thought, "I am on my way to death."

She was the first to speak.

"Seven months have gone since that day at Whitehall."

"Ay," he answered, "seven months."

She went on: "I have learned not to reckon life that way. Since that day at Whitehall life has lasted a very long time."

Again he echoed—"A very long time." Then, after a pause: "I have made for you a long, long life. If to have done so is to your irreparable loss, then this, also, is to be forgiven. . . . Long life! now in the watches of one night I live to be an old man! For you may forgetfulness come at last!"

She turned slightly, looking at him from

beneath the gold star. "Wish me no such happy wishes! Let me not think that such wishes dwell in your heart. Since that day at Whitehall I have written to you—written twice. Why did you never answer?"

He looked down upon his clasped hands. "What was there to be said? I thought, 'I have sorely wounded her whom I love, and with my own words I have seared that wound as with white heat of iron. Now God keep me man enough to say no farther word!'"

"I was benumbed that day," she said; "I was frozen. My brother's face came between us. . . . Oh, my brother! . . . Since that day I have seen Sir John Nevil ——"

"Then a just man told you my story justly," he began, but she interrupted him, her breath coming faster.

"I have also made other inquiry; on my knees, on my face, in the dead of the night when I knew that thou, too, waked, I have asked of God, and of our Lord the Christ who suffered. . . . I know not if They heard me, there be so many that clamour in Their ears. . . ." With a quick movement she arose from the stone seat

and began to pace the grass-plot, her hands clasped behind her head, the gold star yet bright in the late, late sunshine. 'I would They had answered me distinctly. Perhaps They did. . . . But be that as it may be, I will follow my own heart, I will go my own way——"

He rose and began to walk with her. "And thy heart led thee this way?" he asked in a whisper.

She flashed upon him a look so bright that it was as if high noon had returned to the garden. "Pluck me yonder lily," she said. "It is the first I have smelled this year."

He brought it to her, trembling. "Presently it will close," he said, "never to open again."

"That also is among the things we know not," she answered. "Think you not there is One who revives the souls of men?"

"Ay, I believe it," he answered. They paced again the green to its flowery margin.

"Give me yon spray of love-lies-bleeding," she said; then as it rested against the lily in her hand, "Wounds may be cured," she said. "I have heard talk here, there, at the court even, else, beshrew me, if I had come this way to-day! I know that

thou goest forth——" Her voice broke and the gold star shook with the trembling of her frame. "I know that thou mayest never, never, never return. I will pray for thy soul's welfare. . . . See! there is a heartsease at my feet."

He knelt but touched not the floweret, instead caught at the long folds of her silver gown and held her where she stood. "For my soul's welfare, thou balm from heaven!" he cried. "For only my soul's welfare?"

"No, no," she answered. "For the welfare of all of thee, soul and body—soul and body!" She bent over him, and there fell from her eyes a bright rain of tears, quickly come, quickly checked. "Ah, a contrary world of queens and guardians!" she cried. "Oh, my God! if thou mightst only make me thy wife before thou goest!"

He arose and drew her into his arms. "The story is true," he whispered, to which she answered—

"I care not! Sayst thou, 'A thing was done.' Say I, '*Thou* didst it!' and high above the deed I love thee!"

Suddenly she fell into a storm of weeping, then broke from him, and somewhat blindly sought the garden seat, sank down

upon it, and buried her face in her arms. He kneeled beside her, and presently she was crouching against his breast, that rose and fell with his answering emotion. She put up her hand and touched the deep lines of past suffering in the face above her.

"I know that thou must go," she said. "I would not have thee stay. But, Mortimer, if it were possible. . . . He forgave you long, long ago, for he loved you above all men. I, his sister, answer for him. Ah, God wot! brother and sister we have loved you well. . . . If I could keep tryst, after all, if thou couldst make me thy wife before thou goest—or if kindred and the Queen be too powerful, I could escape, could follow thee as thy page, trusting thy honour. . . . Ah! look not so upon me! Ah, to be a woman and do one's own wooing! Ah, think what thou wilt of me, only know that I love thee to the uttermost!"

Ferne left her side, and moving to the garden wall, looked out over the far-away downs to the far-away sea—the sea that for weary months had called and thundered in his ears. Now he saw it all halcyon, stretching fair and mute to the boundless west, the sinking sun, the lovers' star. They

two—could they two, lying with closed eyes, but drift out over bar, floating away through golds and purples towards the kiss of heaven and sea—flotsam of this earth, jetsam of age-distant shores, each to the other paradise and all in all! How profound the stillness—how deep the fragrance of the lily—what indifference, what quiet as of scorn did the Maker of man, having placed His creature in the lists, turn aside to other spectacles! . . . Should man be more careful than his God? Right! Wrong!—to die at last and find them indeed words of a length and the prize of sore striving a fool's bauble:—to die and miss the rose and wine cup!—to die and find not the struggle and the star!—to loose the glorious bird in the hand and beyond the portals to feel no fanning of a vaster wing! What use—what use—to be at once the fleeing Adam and the dark archangel at Eden's gates?

He turned to behold the woman whom now, with no trace of the fancifulness, the idealism of his time, he loved with all depth, passion, actuality; he set wrist to teeth, and bit the flesh until blood started; he moved towards her where she sat with her hands clasped above her knee, her head

thrown back, watching his coming with those deep eyes of hers. He reached her side; she rose to meet him, and the two stood embraced in the flattering sunshine, the odour of the lilies, the pale glory of the failing day.

"My dear love, it is not possible," he said. "Flower of women! didst dream that I would leave thee here blasted by my name, or that I would carry thee where I must go? Star of my earth, to-day we say a clean farewell!"

"Then God be with thee," she said, brokenly.

"And with thee!" he answered. Hand in hand they moved to the broken wall, and leaning upon it, looked out to that far line of sea. Her under-sleeve of silver gauze fell away from her arm.

"How white is thy arm!" he breathed. "How branched with tender blue!"

"Wilt kiss it?" she answered, "so I shall grow to love myself."

"Thou art the fairest thing the sun shines on," he said. "Thy lips are like flowers I have never seen in the West."

"Gather the flowers," she said, and raised her face to his. "The garden is kept for thee."

The sun began to decline, the earth to darken, swallows circled past. "It grows late," she said, "late, late! When goest thou?"

"Within the week."

"By then her Grace will have whirled me leagues away. . . . I would I were a queen. If thou goest to death—oh God! we'll not speak of that! Give me that chain of thine."

He unclasped it, laid it in her hands. Raising her arms, she drew it over her neck.

"Seest thou thy prisoner?" she asked. "For ever thy prisoner!" From its fellow of watchet blue she detached her floating silver sleeve. "It is my favour," she whispered. "Wear it when thou wilt."

He folded the gauze and thrust it within his doublet. "When I may, my lady," he said, with his eyes upon the sunset that held the colours of the dawning. "When I may."

A sickle moon swung in the gold harvest-fields of the west, then a great star came out to watch that reaping. The thrush was silent now, but from a covert rushed suddenly the full tide of a nightingale's song. With a cry the maid of honour put hands to her ears. "Ay me, my heart it will break! Tell me that thou goest but to come again!"

He took her hands, pressing them to his heart, to his lips. "No, no, my dearest dear, since God no longer worketh miracles! I go more surely than ever went John Oxenham; I would not have thee cheat thyself, spend thy days in watching, listening. I kiss thee a life-time good-bye. . . . Oh child, seest thou how broken I am? I that myself loosed all the winds—I that kneel, a penitent, before the just and the unjust, before my lover and my foe! But when all's said, all's done, all's quiet—the arrow sped, the stone fallen, the curfew rung, the dust returned to dust! then shall stand my soul. . . . A ruined man, a man in just disgrace, who hath played the coward, who hath sinned against thee and against others, that am I—yet our souls endure, and thou art my mate; queenly as thou standest here, thou art my mate! I love thee, and in life, in death, I claim thee still: Forget me not when I am gone!"

"When thou art gone!" she cried. "When thou art gone with all my mind I'll hold myself thy bride! In those strange countries beneath the sun if bitterness comes over thee"—she put her hand to her heart—"think of thy fireside here. Think, 'Even

in this wavering life I have an abiding home, a heart that's true, true, true to me ! ' When thou diest—if thou diest first—linger for me ; where a thousand years are as a day travel not so far that I may not overtake thee. Mortimer, Mortimer, Mortimer ! I'll not believe in a God who at the last says not to me, ' That path he took.' When He says it, listen for my flying feet. Oh, my dear, listen for my flying feet ! "

" Star and rose ! " he said. " If we dream, we dream. Better so, even though we pass to sleep too deep for dreaming. For we plan a temple though we build it not. . . . That falconer's whistle ! is it thy signal ? Then thou must make no tarrying here. I will put thy cloak about thee."

He brought from the ruinous steps her watchet mantle, and she let him clasp it about her throat. In the raised air of that isolate peak where true lovers take farewell there are few words used at the last. Sighs, kisses, broken utterance—" For ever," . . . " For ever," . . . " I love thee," . . . " I love thee " ; the eternal " I will come " ; the eternal " I will wait ! " Possessors of an instant of time, of an atom of space, they sent their linked hopes, their mailed cer-

tainties forth to the unseen, untrenched fields of the future, and held their love coeval with existence. Then, slowly, she withdrew herself from his clasp, and as slowly moved backward to the broken stair. He waited by the stone seat, for she must go secretly and in silence, and he might not, as in old times, lead her with stateliness through the ways of Ferne House. Upon the uppermost step she paused a moment, and he, lifting his eyes, saw above him her mantled figure, her outstretched arms with the lily of her body in between, the gold star swimming above her forehead. One breathless moment thus, then she turned, and folding her mantle about her, passed from her lover's sight towards the darkening orchard.

He stayed an hour in the garden, then went back to his great, old, dimly lighted hall. Here, half the night, chin in one hand, the other hanging below his booted knee, he brooded over the now glowing, now ashen chimney logs ; yet Robin-a-dale, who believed in Master Arden, and very mightily in visions as beautiful as that which had been vouchsafed to him going through the orchard that eventide, felt as light a

heart as if no shadowy ship awaited in the little port down by the little town, whose people either cursed or looked askance. Waking in the middle of the night, he thought he saw a knight at prayer—one of the old stone Templars from Ferne church, where they lay with palm to palm, awaiting with frozen patience the last trumpet-call that ever they should hear. This knight, however, was kneeling with bowed head and hidden face, a thing against all rule with those other stark, and sternly waiting forms. So Robin, being too drowsy to reason, let the matter alone and went to sleep again.

CHAPTER X

THE *Sea Wraith*, an ancient ship, grey and patched of sail, battered and worn and with a name for all disaster, sailed the Spanish seas as though she bore a charmed life—and her crew that was the refuse of land and sea, used to licence, to whom mutiny was no uglier a word than another, kept the terms of an iron discipline—and her Captain waked and slept as one aware of when to wake and when to sleep.

There was fever between the decks; there was fever in black hearts; of dark nights a corposant burned now at this masthead, now at that. Mariner and soldier knew the story of the shadowy figure keeping company with the stars there above them on the poop-royal. Did he keep company only with the stars and with the boy, his familiar? The sick, tossing from side to side, raved out curses, and the well saw many omens. Dissatisfaction, never far from their unstayed minds, crept at

times very near, and superstition sat always amongst them. But they reckoned with a Captain stronger for this voyage than had been Francis Drake or John Hawkins, and stranger than any under whom they had ever sailed. He was so still a man that they knew not how to take him, but beneath his eyes vain imaginings and half-formed conspiracies withered like burnt paper. He called upon neither God nor devil, but his voice blew like an icy wind upon the heat of disloyal intents, and like the white fire that touched now stem, now stern, so his will held the ship, driving it like a leaf toward the mainland and the fortress of Nueva Cordoba.

The ship that seemed so aged and disgraced, yet had a strength of sinew which made her formidable. All things had been patiently cared for by the man who, selling his patrimony, had laboured against wind and tide to the end that he might carry forth with him such an armament as scarce had been the *Cygnet's* own. Tier on tier rose the *Sea Wraith's* ordnance; she carried warlike stores of all sorts that might serve for battle by sea or land. If his money could not buy such men as stood ready to ship with Drake and Hawkins, yet in his wild, sin-stained crew

he had purchased experience, the maddest bravery, and a lust of Spanish gold that might not be easily sated. The qualities of a captain over men he himself supplied.

In his confidence neither before nor after their sailing, yet the two hundred men of the *Sea Wraith* guessed well his destination, but for themselves preferred the island towns—Santiago and Santo Domingo in Hispaniola. There were wealth and wine and women, there the fringing islets where booty might be hidden, and there the deep caves where foregathered many small craft misnamed piratical. "Lord! the *Sea Wraith* would soon make herself Admiral of that brood, leading them forth from those hidden places to pounce upon Santo Domingo, that was the seat of government and as wealthy a place as any in the Indies!—the *Sea Wraith* and her Captain, that was a good Captain and a tall!—ay, ay, that would they maintain despite all land talk—a good Captain and a tall, 'spite of Dick Carpenter's dream——"

"What was Dick Carpenter's dream?" asked the Captain, seated, sword in hand and hat on head, before a deputation from the forecastle.

The speaker fidgeted, then out came the

clumsy taunt, the carpenter's dream. "Why sir, he dreamed he saw the women of the islands, sitting by the shores, a-sifting gold-dust and a-weighing of pearls; and then he dreamed that he looked along the sea-floor, leagues and leagues to the south'ard, until he saw the very roots of the mainland, and the great fish swimming in and out. And a many and a many dead men were there, drawn into ranks, very strange to see, for their swollen flesh yet hung to their bones, and they beckoned and laughed; and Captain Robert Baldry, that was once, on a Guinea voyage, Dick Carpenter's Captain, he laughed the loudest and beckoned the fastest. And, Sir Mortimer Ferne, an it please you, we've no longing to follow that beckoning."

"Thou dog!" said the Captain, with no change of mien. "Presently Dick Carpenter and thou shall have food for dreams—bad dreams, bad dreams, man! Thou fool, have I set thee quaking who, forsooth, would mutiny! Begone, the whole of ye, and sail the whole of ye wheresoever I list to go!"

Seeing that the *Sea Wraith* obeyed him still, her crew believed yet more devoutly

that a secret voice spoke in his ear and a dark hand gave him aid. It was later, when he began to feed them with gold, that they who owned caps threw them up for him, and they whose brains had only nature's thatching shouted for him as for a demigod. A Spanish squadron bound for The Havannah was met by a hurricane, several of its ships lost, and the remainder widely separated. The hurricane past, forth from an island harbour stole the *Sea Wraith* that so many storms had beleaguered. Grey as with eld, lonely as the ark, a haggard ship manned by outcasts, she spread her vampire wings and flitted from her enshadowed anchorage. An hour later, like a vampire still, she hooked herself to a gay galleon and sucked from it life that was cheap and gold that was dear; then descrying other sails, she left that ruined hulk for a long and fierce struggle with a Portuguese carrack. The battle waxed so fell that the carrack also might have been worked by men who had all to win and naught to lose, and captained by one who bared his brow to the thunder-stone.

Like harpies they fought, but when night came there was only the *Sea Wraith* scudding to the south, and that pied crew of hers

knocking at the stars with the knowledge that ever and always their judgment (even though he asked it not) jumped with the Captain's, and that before them lay the gilded cities and the chances of Pizarro. It was of his subtlety that the Captain never used to them fair promises, spake not once a se'n-night of gold, never bragged to them of what must be. Oh! a subtle captain, whose very strangeness was his best lieutenant upon that eldritch, nine-lived ship, through days and days of monstrous luck. "Baldry's luck," quoth the mariner who had sailed with the *Star*, then held his breath and looked askance at his present Captain, who, however, could never have heard him up there on the poop-deck! Nathless that night the man was ordered forward, and finding Sir Mortimer Ferne sitting alone, save for the boy, in the great cabin, was bidden to talk of Robert Baldry. "Speak freely, Carpenter—freely! Why, thou art one of his friends, and I another, and we go, somewhat at our peril, to hale him from perdition! Why, thou thyself sawest him beckoning to us to hasten and do our friendly part! So praise thy old Captain to me with all thy might. We'll fill an empty hour with stories of his valour!" He put forth his

hand and turned the hour-glass, and the carpenter began to stammer and make excuses, which no whit availed him.

At last, one afternoon, they came to Margarita, and, the ship needing water, they entered a placid bight, where a strip of dazzling sand lay between the rippling surf and a heavy wood, but found beforehand with them a small bark from the mainland, her crew ashore filling barrels from a limpid spring, and her master and a Franciscan friar eating fruit upon her tiny poop. The dozen on land showed their heels; the worthless bark was taken, a party with calivers landed to complete the filling of the abandoned casks, and the master and the friar brought before the Captain of the *Sea Wraith*, where he sat beneath a great tree, tasting the air of the land. An insatiable gatherer of Spanish news, it was his custom to search for what crumbs of knowledge his captives might possess; but hitherto the yield, pressed together, had not even made a small cake of enlightenment. He was prepared to have shortly done with the two who now stood before him. The seaman cringed, expecting torture, furtively watching for some indication of what the Englishman wished him to

say. A fellow new to these parts and ignorant, he would have sworn a highway to El Dorado itself if that was the point toward which his inquisitor's quiet, unemphatic questions tended; but he knew not, and his lies fell dead before the grave eyes of the man beneath the tree. At last he was tossed aside like a squeezed sponge and the Franciscan beckoned forward, who, being of sturdier make, twisted his thumbs in his rope girdle and prepared to present a blank countenance to those queries of armaments and treasure which an enemy to Spain would naturally make. But the Englishman asked strange questions; so general that they seemed to encompass the mainland from Tres Puntas to Nombre de Dios, and so particular that it was even as if he were interested in the friar himself, his order, and his wanderings from town to town, the sights that he had seen and the people whom he had known. The questions seemed harmless as mother's milk, but the friar was shrewd; moreover, in his youth had been driven to New Spain by flaming zeal for the conversion of countless souls. That fire had burned low, but by its dying light he knew that this man, who was young and yet so still, whose lowered voice was but as sheathed

steel, whose eyes it was not comfortable to meet, had set his hand to a plough that should drive a straight furrow, was sending his will like an arrow to no uncertain mark. But what was the mark the Franciscan could not discover, therefore he gave the truth or a lie where seemed him best, increasingly the truth, as it increasingly appeared that lies would not serve. He also, seeing that with gathering years he had begun to set value upon flesh and bone, wished to please his captor. He glanced stealthily at the scarred and ancient craft in the windless harbourage, idly flapping her mended sails, before he said aught of the great English ships that in pomp and the fulness of pride had entered these waters now months agone. The Englishman had heard of this adventure—so much was evident—but details would have seemed to have escaped him. He knew, however, that there had been first victory and then defeat, and he too looked at his ship and at the guns she carried.

"The town was sacked, but the castle not taken," he said. "What, good brother, if I should break a lance in these same lists?"

"It would be broken indeed," said the friar grimly. "An it please you, I will bear

your challenge to Don Juan de Mendez."

"To Don Luiz de Guardiola," said the man beneath the tree.

"Pardon, señor, but Juan de Mendez is at present Governor of Nueva Cordoba. Don Luiz de Guardiola has been transferred to Panama."

The Englishman arose and looked out to sea, his hand above his eyes because of the flash and sparkle of the sun upon the water. The Franciscan, having told the truth, wondered forthwith if falsehood had better served his turn. Face and form of his interlocutor were turned from him, but he saw upon the hot, white sand, the shadow of a twitching hand. Moments passed before the shadow was still; then said the Englishman, in a changed voice—

"Since you know of its governors, old and new, I judge you to be of Nueva Cordoba. So you may inform me of certain matters."

"You mistake, señor, you mistake," began the Franciscan, somewhat hastily. "The master of the bark will bear witness that I came to Margarita upon the *Santa Maria*, sailing directly from Cartagena, but that, being ill, I chose to recover myself at Pampatar before proceeding (as you now behold me,

valorous señor) to Hispaniola, and thence by the first vessel home to Spain, to the convent of my order at Segovia, which is my native town. I know naught of Nueva Cordoba beyond that which I have told you."

"Why, I believe thee," answered the Englishman, his back still turned. "You go from Cartagena, where, Franciscan and Dominican, you play so large a part in this world's affairs, to your order at Segovia, which is an inland town, and doubtless hath no great knowledge of these outlandish parts. Your tongue will tire with telling of wonders."

"Why, that is true," answered the other. "One lives not fifteen years in these parts to carry away but a handful of marvels." Relieved by the easiness of his examination and the courtesy of his captor, he even smiled and ventured upon a small pleasantry. "You cannot take from me, redoubtable señor, that which my eyes have seen and my ears have heard."

Ferne wheeled. "Give me the letter which you bear from your superior at Cartagena to the head of your order at Segovia."

As he recoiled, the Franciscan's hand went involuntarily to the breast of his gown, and then fell again to his side. The Captain of

the *Sea Wraith* whistled, and several of the mariners, who were now rolling the water-casks down the little beach to the waiting boats, came at his call. "Seize him," ordered the Captain. "Robin, take from him the packet he carries."

When he had from the boy's hand a small, silk-enwrapped packet, and had given orders for the guarding of the two prisoners, he turned and strode alone into the woods, which stretched almost to the water's edge. It was as though he had plunged into a green cavern far below the sea. In slow waves, to and fro, swayed the firmament of palms; lower, flowering lianas, jewel-coloured, idle as weeds of the sea, ran in tangles and gaudy mazes from tree to tree. He sat himself down in the green gloom, broke seal, unwrapped the silk, and read the letter, which he had acutely guessed could not fail of being sent by so responsible a hand as the friar's from one dignitary of the order to another. Much stateliness of Latin greeting, commendation of the returning missionary, mention of a slight present of a golden dish wrought in alacrity and joy by Indian converts; lastly, and with some minuteness, the gossip, political and ecclesiastical, of the past twelfth month. The sinking of the

Spanish ships and the sacking of the town of Nueva Cordoba by English pirates, together with their final defeat, were touched upon; but more was made of the yield to the Church of heretic souls, in all of whom Satan stood fast. The Holy Office had delivered them to the secular arm, and the letter closed with a circumstantial account of a great *auto-da-fé* in the square of Cartagena.

Without the wood, upon the edge of white sand, the men of the *Sea Wraith* waited for their Captain. At last he came, so quiet of mien and voice that only Robin-a-dale stared, caught his breath, and gazed hard upon an ashen face.

Ferne's orders were of the curtest: Begone, every man of them, to the *Sea Wraith*, and lie at anchor waiting for the morning. For himself, he should spend the night ashore; they might leave for him the cockboat, and with the first light he would come aboard. The two prisoners—place them in the ransacked bark and let them go whither they would or could. He glanced in their direction, then turning sharply, crossed the sand to stand for a moment beside the Franciscan.

"Prithee, thou brown-robed fellow, how looked he in a *sanbenito*—that tall, fierce,

black-bearded Captain that your Provincial mentions here?" The parchment rustled in his hand.

The friar quailed before the narrowed eyes; then, the old flame in him leaping up, he answered, boldly enough, "It became him well, señor—well, as it becomes every enemy to Spain and the Church!"

The other slightly laughed. "Why, go thy ways for a man of courage! but go quickly while yet in all this steadfast world I find no fault save with myself."

He stood to watch the embarkment of the mariners, who, if they wondered at this latest command, had learned at least to wonder in silence. But Robin-a-dale hung back, made protest. "Go!" said his master, whereupon Robin went indeed—not to the awaiting boat, but with a defiant cry and a rush across the sloping sand into the thick wood. The green depths which received him were so labyrinthine, so filled with secret places wherein to hide, that an hour's search might not dislodge him. The sometime Captain of the *Cygnet* let pass his wilfulness, signed to the boats to push off, awaited in silence the fulfilment of all his commands; then turning, rounded the eastern point of the tiny bay,

and was lost to sight in the shadows of the now late afternoon.

The sun went down behind the lofty trees ; the brief dusk passed, and the little beach showed faintly beneath the stars, great and small, of a moonless night. Above the western horizon clouds arose and the lightning constantly flashed, but there was no thunder, and only the sound of the low surf upon the shore. Robin, creeping from the wood, saw the *Sea Wraith* at anchor, and by the distant lightning the bark from Pampatar drifting far away without sail or rudder. Rounding the crescent of gleaming sand, he lost the *Sea Wraith* and the bark, but found whom he sought. Finding him, he made no sign, but sat himself down in the lee of a sand-dune, and with a memory swept clear of later prayers, presently began in a frightened whisper to say his

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John——"

Half-way down the pallid beach stood Ferne, visible enough even by the starlight, now and then completely shown by one strong lightning flash. His doublet was thrown aside, his right arm advanced, his hand grasping the hilt of his drawn sword. But the sword point was lowered, his breast bared ;

he stood like one who awaits, who invites, the last thrust, in mortal surrender to an invisible foe. The lines of the figure expressed a certain weariness and suspense, as of one who would that all was over, and who finds the victor strangely tardy. The face, seen by the occasional lightning flash, was a little raised, a little expectant.

Robin-a-dale, seeing and comprehending, buried his head in his arms and with his fingers dug into the sand. Now and then he looked up, but always there was the pallid slope of the beach, the intermittent break of the surf that was like the inflection of a voice low and far away ; the stars and the groups of stars, strange, strange after those of home ; the lightning from the western heavens ; the duellist awaiting with lowered point the coming of that antagonist who had so fiercely lived, so fiercely died, so fiercely hated, that to the reeling brain of his challenger it well might seem that Death, now holding the door between betrayed and betrayer, might not prevail.

The boy's heart was a stone within him, and he saw not why God allowed much that went on beneath His throne. A long time he endured, half prone upon the sand, hating

the sound of the surf, hating the flash of the lightning ; but at last, when a great part of the night had passed, he arose and went toward his master. The shadow of the dune disguised the slightness of his form, and his foot struck with some violence against a shell. The lightning flashed, and he saw Ferne's waiting face.

" Master, master ! " he cried. " 'Tis only Robin—not him ! not him ! Master——"

Stumbling over the sand, he fell beside the man whose soul cried in vain unto Robert Baldry to return and claim his vengeance, and wrenched at the hand that seemed to have grown to the sword-hilt. " You are not kind ! " he wailed. " Oh, let me have it ! "

" Kind ! " echoed Ferne, slowly. " In this sick universe there is no kindness—no, nor never was ! There is the space between rack and torch." In the flashing of the lightning he loosed his rigid clasp, and the sword, clanking against the scabbard, fell upon the sand. The lightning widened into a sheet of pale violet and the surf broke with a deeper voice. " Canst thou not find me, O mine enemy ? " Ferne cried aloud.

Presently, the boy yet clinging to him, he

sank down beside him on the sand. "Sleep, boy; sleep," he said. "Now I know that the gulf is fixed indeed, and that they lie who say the ghost returns."

"It is near the dawning," said the boy. "Do you rest, master, and I will watch."

"Nay," answered the other. "I have pictures to look upon. . . . Well, well, lay thy head upon the sand and dream of a merry world, and I myself will close my eyes. An he will, he may take me sleeping."

Robin slept and dreamed of Ferne House and the horns of the hunters. At last the horns came so loudly over the hills that he awakened, to find himself lying alone on the sand in a great and solemn flush of dawn. He started up with a beating heart; but there, coming toward him from a bath in the misty sea, was his master, dressed, and with his sword again in its sheath. As he made closer approach, the strengthening dawn showed the distinction of form and countenance. To the latter had returned the stillness and the worn beauty of yesterday, before the bark from Pampatar had brought news. The head was bared, and the light fell curiously upon the short and waving hair, imparting to it, as it seemed, some quality of its own.

Robin, beholding, stumbled to his feet, staring and trembling.

"Why dost thou shake so?" asked the Captain of the *Sea Wraith*. "And thou art as white as is the sand! God forfend that the fever be on thee!"

More nearly the old voice of before these evil days of low, stern utterance! More nearly the old, kindly touch! Robin-a-dale, suddenly emboldened, caught at hand and arm and burst into a passionate outcry, a frenzy of entreaty. "Home! home! may we not go home now? They're all dead—Captain Robert Baldry and Giles Walter and all! And you meant no harm by them—O Jesu! you meant no harm! There's gold in the hold of the *Sea Wraith* for to buy back Ferne House, and now that you've won, and won again from the Spaniard, the Queen will not be angry any more! And Sir John and Sir Philip and Master Arden will bid us welcome, and men will come to stare at the *Sea Wraith*, that has fought so many battles! Master, master, let us home to Ferne House, where, at sunset, in the garden, you and the lady walked! Master——"

His voice failed. Sir Mortimer loosed the fingers that yet clung to his arm. "When

I am king of these parts, thou shalt be my jester," he said. "Come! for it's up sail and far away this morning—far away as Panama. I am thirsty. We'll drink of the spring and then begone."

When they had rounded once more the wooded point they saw the *Sea Wraith*, and drawn up upon the sand, its cockboat. The sun had risen, so that now when they entered the forest there was ample light by which to find out the slowly welling spring, so limpid in its basin as to serve for a mirror to the forest creatures who drank therefrom. All the tenants of the forest were awake. They hooted and chattered, screamed and sang. Orange and green and red, the cockatoos flashed through the air, or perched upon great boughs beside parasitic blooms as gaudy as themselves. Giant palms rustled; monkeys slid down the swinging lianas, to climb again with haste, chattering wildly at human intrusion; butterflies fluttered aside; the spotted snake glided to its deeper haunts. Suddenly, in the distance, a wild beast roared, and when the thunder ceased there was a mad increase of the lesser voices. Sound was everywhere, but no sweetness; only the mockery, gibing, land laughter of an unseen multitude. From

the topmost palm frond to the over-coloured fungi patching the black earth arrogant Beauty ruled, but to the weary eyes that looked upon her she was become an evil queen. Better one blade of English grass, better one song of the lark, than the gardens of Persephone !

Ferne, kneeling beside the spring, stooped to drink. Clear as that fountain above which Narcissus leaned, the water gave him back each lineament of the man who, accepting his own earthly defeat, had yet gathered all the powers of his being to the task of overmastering that bitter Fate into whose hands he had delivered, bound, both friend and foe ; the man for whom, now that he knew what he knew, now that the fierce victrix had borne away her prey, was left but that remaining purpose, that darker thread which since yesterday's snapping of its fellow strands had grown strong with the strength of all. Before the water could touch his lips he also saw the mark one night had set upon him, and drew back with a slight start from his image in the pool ; then, after a moment, bent again and drank his fill.

When Robin-a-dale had also quenched his thirst the two left the forest, and together

dragged the cockboat down the sand and launched it over the gentle surf. Ferne rowed slowly, with a mind that was not for Robin, nor the glory of the tropic morning, nor the shock of yesterday, nor the night's despair. He looked ahead, devising means to an end, and his brows were yet bent in thought when the boat touched the *Sea Wraith's* side.

As much a statesman of the sea as Drake himself, he knew how to gild authority and hold it high, so that they beneath might take indeed the golden bubble for the sun that warmed them. He kept state upon the *Sea Wraith* as upon the *Cygnet*, though of necessity it was worn with a difference. For him now, as then, music played while he sat at table in the great cabin, alone, or with his rude lieutenants, in a silence seldom broken. Now, as he stepped upon deck, there was a flourish of trumpets, together with the usual salute from mariners and soldiers drawn up to receive him. But their eyes stared and their lips seemed dry, and when he called to him the master who had fought with Barbary pirates for half a lifetime, the master trembled somewhat as he came.

It was the hour for morning prayer, and

the *Sea Wraith* lacked not her chaplain, a man honeycombed with disease and secret sin. The singing to a hidden God swelled so loud that it rang in the ears of the sick below, tossing, tossing, muttering and murmuring, though it pierced not the senses of them who lay still, who lay, very, very still. The hymn ended, the chaplain began to read, but the grey-haired Captain stopped him with a gesture. "Not that," he commanded. "Read me a psalm of vengeance, Sir Demas—a psalm of righteous vengeance!"

CHAPTER XI

IN England, since the stealing forth of one lonely ship, heard of no more, three spring times had kissed finger-tips to winter and burgeoned into summer, and three summers had held courts in pride, then shrivelled into autumn. In King Philip of Spain his Indies, blazing sunshine, cataracts of rain, had marked off a like number of years, when Sir Francis Drake, with an Armada of five-and-twenty ships, fresh from the spoiling of Santiago and Santo Domingo, held the strong town of Cartagena, and awaited the tardy forthcoming of the Spanish ransom. Week piled itself upon week, and the full amount was yet lacking. When negotiations prospered, and the air was full of promise, Sir Francis and all his captains and volunteers were most courteous, exchanging with their enemies compliment and entertainment; when the Spanish commissioners drew back, or when the morning report of the English dead from fever or old injuries was long,

half the day might be spent in the deliberate sacking of some portion of the town. With the afternoon the commissioners gave ground again, and like enough the evening ended with some splendid love-feast between Spaniard and Englishman. On the morrow came the usual hitch, the usual assurances that the gold of the town had been buried (one knew not where) by its fleeing people, the usual proud wheedling for the naming by the victors of a far lower ransom. Drake having reaped more glory than gain from Santiago and Santo Domingo, was now obstinate in his demand, but Carlisle, the Lieutenant-General, counselled less rigorous terms, and John Nevil, who with two ships of his own had joined Drake at the Terceiras, spoke of the fever. "It is no common sickness. Each day sees a battle lost by us, won by the Spaniard. You have held his strongest city for now five weeks. There are other cities, other adventures upon which you will fight again, and again, and again, until you die, Frank Drake."

"There were a many dead this morning," put in Powell, the sergeant-major. "There had been a many more were't not for the friar's remedy."

Drake moved impatiently. "I would your miracle of Saint Francis his return had wrought itself somewhat sooner. Now it is late in the day—though God knows I am glad for the least of my poor fellows if he be raised from his sickness through this or any other cure. . . . Captain Carlisle, you will see to it that before night I have the opinion of all the land captains touching our contentment with a moiety of the ransom and our leave-taking of this place. Captain Cecil, you will speak for the officers of the ships. Gentlemen, the council is over."

As the group dissolved and the men began to move and speak with freedom, Giles Arden touched Captain Powell upon the sleeve.

"What monk's tale is this of a Spanish friar who heals Lutheran dogs? I' faith I had bodeful dreams last night, and waked this morning now hot, now cold. I'll end my days with no foul fever—an I can help it! What's the man and his remedy?"

"Why," answered Powell doubtfully, "his words are Spanish, but at times I do think the man is no such thing. He came to the camp a week agone, waving a piece of white cloth and supporting a youth, who, it seems,

was like to have pined away amongst the Indian villages, all for lack of Christian sights and sounds. The friar having brought him to the hospital, wished to leave him with the chirurgeons, and himself return to the Indians whom, we understand, he has gathered into a mission. But the youth cried out, and clutching at the other's robe ('twas a pity to see, for he was very weak), dragged himself to his feet and set his face again to the forest. Whereupon the elder gave way, and since then has nursed his companion—ay, and many another poor soul who longs no more for gold and the strange things of earth. As for the remedy—he goes to the forest and returns, and with him two, or maybe three, stout Indians bearing bark and branch of a certain tree, from which he makes an infusion. I only know that for well-nigh all the stricken he hath lithened the fever, and that he hath recalled to life many an one whom the chirurgeon had given over to the chaplain."

"What like is the youth?" queried Arden.

"Why, scarce a boy, nor yet a man in years; and, for all his illness, watcheth the other like any faithful dog. English, moreover——"

"English!"

"At times he grows light-headed, and then his speech is English. The gowned fellow stills him with his hand, or gives him some portion, whereupon he sleeps."

"What like is this Spanish friar?" broke in suddenly and with harshness Sir John Nevil's voice.

"Why, sir," Powell answered, "his cowl overshadows his face, but going suddenly on yesterday into the hut where he bides with the youth, I saw that as he bent over his patient the cowl had fallen back. My gran'ther (rest his soul), who died at ninety, had not whiter hair."

"An old man!" exclaimed Sir John, and, sighing, turned himself in his chair. Arden, rising, left the company for the window, where he looked down upon the city of Cartagena and outward to the investing fleet. The streets of the town were closed by barricades, admirably constructed by the Spaniards but now in English possession. Beyond the barricades, and near the sea, were the low and narrow buildings where lay the wounded and the fever-stricken. It was a rude hospital enough; forming to some therein but a baiting-place where pain and panic and the

miseries of the brain were become, for the time, their bedfellows; to others the very house of dissolution, a fast crumbling shelter built upon the brim of the world, with Death, the impartial beleaguer, already at the door. Arden turned aside and joined the group about Drake, the great sea-captain, in whose company nor fear nor doubting melancholy could long hold place.

That night, shortly after the setting of the watch, Sir John Nevil, with a man or two behind him, found himself challenged at the barricade of a certain street, gave the word, and passed on, to behold immediately before him, and travelling the same road, a dark, unattended figure. To his sharp "Who goes there?" a familiar voice made answer, and Arden paused until his friend and leader came up with him.

"A common road and a common goal," spoke Nevil.

"Ay! common fools!" answered the other, "who, hearing of grey geese, must think, forsooth, of a swan whose plumage turned from white to black. And yet, God knows! to one, at least, the self-same splendid swan; if lost, then lost magnificently. . . . This is an idle errand."

"The youth is English," replied Nevil.

"Did you speak to Powell?"

"Ay; I told him that I should visit the hospital this night. We are close at hand."

"There is a pale light surrounds this place," said Arden. "It comes from the fires which they burn as though the Black Death were upon us. Do you hear that groaning?—and there they carry out a weighted body. War!"

A group of men moved toward them—Powell, a chirurgeon, a soldier or two. Another minute and all were gathered before the hut of which Powell had made mention. That worthy officer waved back their following, and the three alone entered the dimly lighted place. "The friar is not here," said Powell in a tone of vexation. "Passing this way, I did but look within to cheer the youth by some mention of the honour that was intended him to-night. Now they tell me that the man went to the forest ere sunset, and hath not returned. Also that he gave the youth a sleeping potion——"

"Which hath not brought sleep," answered Arden, who was keen of sight.

"I took it not!" cried out the half-risen form from its pallet in the corner of the hut.

"He thought I drank it, but when his head was turned I threw it away. Master Arden! Master Arden! come over to me!"

Arden raised, embraced, supported, the figure that, quivering with weakness and excitement, might also feel the heaving breast, the quickened heart-beats of the man who held him. Nevil, in whom deep emotion was not apt to show itself, knelt beside the pallet and taking the thin hands caressed them like a very woman. "Lad, lad," he whispered, "where is thy master? Is he dead? Or did he leave thee here but now to search for simples?"

Robin-a-dale looked from the one to the other, great eyes shining in a thin, brown face. "Three years," he said—three years since we crept away from Ferne House in a ship that was called—that was called—that was called the *Sea Wraith*. But no trumpets sounded, and there was no throng to shout farewell. Why was that? But I remember it was three years ago." He laughed weakly. "I'm a man grown, Master Arden, but here's still the rose noble which you gave me once. . . . No; I must have lost it in the woods." He nodded sagely. "I remember; I lost it where the river came over the great rock

with a noise that made me think of a little, sliding stream at home. It was yuletide, but the flowers smelled too sweet, and the great apes and the little monkeys sat in the red trees and mocked me."

"He wanders again," said Powell with vexation. "The friar can bring him back with voice or touch, but not I!"

"Where is the *Sea Wraith*, Robin-a-dale? Answer me!" Nevil's voice rose, cold and commanding, questioning this as any other derelict haled before him. Instinctively Robin brought his wits somewhat together.

"The *Sea Wraith*," he echoed. "Why, that was long ago. . . . Six score men—we left her hidden between the islet and the land until we should return. Her mariners were willing to be left—ay, and when I'm a knight I'll maintain it!—their blood is not upon his hands. . . . But when six men from that six score came again to the coast there was no ship—so I think that she sank some night, or maybe the Spaniards took her, or maybe she grew tired and sailed away, we were so long in winning back from Panama."

There was a deep exclamation from his listeners. "From Panama!"

Robin regarded them anxiously, for to

Nevil, at least, he had always spoken truth, and now he dimly wondered within himself if he were lying. "The nest at Nueva Cordoba was empty," he explained. "The hawk had killed the sparrows and flown far away to Panama."

"And the eagle followed the hawk," muttered Arden. "Was there not one sparrow left alive, Robin?"

Robin mournfully shook his head. "The commoner sort went to the galleys, others were burned. . . . Is this city named Cartagena? Then 'twas in this city, Captain Robert Baldry and Giles Walter and more than they, dressed in *sanbenitos*, burning in the market-place. . . . We learned this at Margarita, so my master would go to Panama to wring the hawk's neck. . . . But the *Sea Wraith* was heavy with gold and silver, and all the scoundrels upon her wished to turn homewards. But he bore them down, and there was a compact made and signed. For them all the treasure that we had gotten or should get, and for him their help to Panama that he might take his private vengeance. And so we put on all sail and we coasted a many days, sometimes fighting and sometimes not, until we drew in toward the land

and found a little harbour masked by an islet, and near to a river. And a third of our men were left with the *Sea Wraith*. But Sir Mortimer Ferne and I—my name is Robin-a-dale—we took all the boats to go as far as we might by way of the river. And my master rowed strongly in the first boat, and I rowed strongly in the second, for we rowed for hate and love ; but the other boats came on feebly, for they were rowed by ghosts——"

Arden moved beneath the emaciated form he held, and Powell, uttered an ejaculation. But John Nevil used command. "Back, sirrah ! to the truth," and the crowding fancies gave ground again. "It was the Indians who shot at us poisoned arrows. They made ghosts of many rowers. Ha ! in all my nineteen years I have not seen an uglier death ! That was why we must leave the river, hiding the boats against the time that we returned that way . . . returned that way."

"You went on through the woods towards Panama. And then——"

Nevil's voice rose again.

"The wrath of God !" answered the boy, and turning within Arden's clasp began to

babble of London streets and the *Triple Tun*. The claw-like hands had dragged themselves from Nevil's hold, and the spirit could be no longer caught by the voice of authority, but wandered where it would.

The men about him waited long and vainly for some turn of the tide. It drew toward midnight, and Robin yet babbled of all things under the sun saving only of a man that had left England now three years agone. At last Nevil arose, spoke a few words to Arden, who nodded assent, then, with Powell, moved to the door.

"When will this friar return?" he asked, as they crossed the threshold.

"I do not know," Powell answered. "With the dawn, perhaps. He will not be long gone."

"Perhaps he will not come at all," said the other. "You say that the boy is out of danger. Perhaps he has returned to the Indians whom you say he teaches."

Powell shook his head. "Here are too many sick and dying," he said simply. "He will come back. I swear to you, Sir John Nevil, that in this pestilent camp between the city and the sea we do think of this man not as a Spaniard—if he be a Spaniard—nor as monk—if he be monk! He hath power

over this fever, and those whom he cannot cure yet cry out for him to help them die!"

There was a silence, followed by Sir John's slow speech. "When he returns send him at once under guard to my quarters—I will make good the matter with Sir Francis. Speak the man fair, good Powell, give him gentle treatment, but see to it that he escape you not. . . . Here are my men. Good-night."

Three hours later, to Nevil, yet dressed, yet sitting deep in thought within his starlit chamber, came a messenger from the captain of the watch. "The man whom Sir John Nevil wot of was below. What disposition until the morning?"

"Bring him to me here," was the answer. "Stay! there are candles upon the table. Light one."

The soldier, drawing from his pouch flint, steel, and tinder box, obeyed, then saluted and withdrew. There was a short silence, followed by the sound of feet upon the stone stairs and a knock at the door, and upon Nevil's "Enter!" by the appearance of a sergeant and several soldiers—in the midst of them a figure, erect, composed, gowned and cowled.

The only candle dimly lit the room. "Will you stand aside, sir?" said Nevil to his captive. "Now, sergeant——"

The sergeant made a brief report.

"Await, you and your men, in the hall below," ordered Nevil. "You have not bound your prisoner? That is well. Now go, leaving him here alone."

The heavy door closed to. Upon the table stood two great gilt candelabra bearing many candles, a fragment of the spoil of Cartagena. Nevil, taking from its socket the one lighted taper, began to apply the flame to its waxen fellows. As the chamber grew more and more brilliant, the friar, standing with folded arms, made no motion to break the profound stillness, but with the lighting of the last candle he thrust far back the cowl that partly hid his countenance, then moved with an even step to the table, and raising with both hands the great candelabrum, held it aloft. The radiance that flooded him, showing every line and lineament, was not more silvery white than the hair upon his head; but brows and lashes were as deeply brown as the somewhat sunken eyes, nor was the face an old man's face. It was lined, quiet, beautiful, with lips somewhat too sternly patient and

eyes too sad for all their wisdom. The friar's gown could not disguise the form beneath; the friar's sleeve, back-fallen from the arm which held on high the branching lights, disclosed deep scars. Down-streaming light, the hour, the stillness—a soul unsteadfast would have shrunk as from an apparition. Nevil stood his ground, the table between him and his guest of three years' burial from English ken. Both men were pale, but their gaze did not waver. So earnestly did they regard each other, eyes looking into eyes, that without words much knowledge of inner things passed between them. At last, "Greet you well, Mortimer Ferne," came from one, and from the other, "Greet you well, John Nevil."

The speaker lowered the candelabrum and set it upon the table. "You might have spared the sergeant his pains. To-day I should have sought you out."

"Why not before to-day?"

"I have been busy," said the other simply. "Long ago the Indians taught me a sure remedy for this fever. There was need down yonder for the cure. Good to see thy face, to hear thy voice, John Nevil."

The tall tapers gave so great and clear a

light that there was no shadow for either countenance. In Nevil's agitation had begun to gather, but his opposite showed as yet only a certain worn majesty of peace. Neither man had moved; each stood erect, with the heavy wood like a judgment bar between them. Perhaps some noise among the soldiers below, some memory that the other had entered the room as a prisoner, brought such a fancy to Nevil's mind, for now he hastily left his position and crossed to the bench beneath the wide window. The man from the grave of the South American forest followed. Sir John stretched out his hand and touched the heavy woollen robe that swept from bared throat to rudely sandalled feet. "This?" he questioned.

The other faintly smiled. "I found it many months agone in a village of the Chaymas. I was nigh to nakedness, and it has served me well. It is only a gown. This" —he touched the knotted girdle—"but a piece of rope."

"I have seen the boy Robin-a-dale," said Nevil.

The other inclined his head. "Captain Powell told me as much, and also that by some slip my poor knave slept not, as I had

meant he should do; but babbled of old things which have well nigh turned his wits. He must not stay in this land, but back to England to feel the snow in his face, to hear the cuckoo and the lark, to serve you or Arden or Philip Sidney. What ancient news hath he given you?"

"You went overland to Panama."

"Ay, a dreadful journey—a most dreadful return. . . . Don Luiz de Guardiola was not at Panama. With a strong escort he had gone three days before to San Juan de Ulloa, whence he sailed for Spain."

A long silence; then said Nevil: "There is no passion in your face, and your voice is grave and sweet. I thank God that he was gone, and that your soul has turned from vengeance."

"Ay, my soul hath turned from vengeance," echoed the other. "It is now a long time that, save for Robin, I have dwelt alone with God His beauty and God His terror. I have taught a savage people, and in teaching I have learned." He moved, and with his knee upon the window seat, looked out upon the fading stars. "But the blood," he said, "the blood upon my hands! I know not if one man who sailed with me upon the *Sea*

Wraith be alive. Certes, all are dead who went with me a fearful way to find that Spaniard who is safe in Spain. Six men, we reached again the seashore, but the ship was gone. One by one, as we wandered, the four men died. . . . Then Robin and I went upward and onward to the mountains."

"When you left England your cause was just," said Nevil with emotion.

"Ay, I think it was so," Sir Mortimer replied. "At home I was for ever naught; on these seas I might yet serve my Queen, though with a shrunken arm. And Robert Baldry, with many another whom I had betrayed, might yet languish in miserable life. Who knows! Perhaps I thought that God might work a miracle. . . . But at Margarita——"

"I know—I know," interrupted Nevil. "Robin told us."

"Then at Margarita," continued the other, "I forgot all else but my revenge upon the man who had wrought disaster to my soul, who had dashed from my hand even that poor salve which might and might not have somewhat eased my mortal wound. Was he at Panama? Then to Panama would I go. In Ultima Thule? Then in Ultima

Thule he should not escape me. . . . I bent the mariners and soldiers of the *Sea Wraith* to my will. I promised them gold; I promised them joyous life and an easy task—I know not what I promised them, for my heart was a hot coal within my breast and there seemed no desirable thing under the sun other than a shortened sword and my hand upon the throat of Don Luiz de Guardiola. They went with me upon my private quarrel, and they died. Ah, well! It has been long ago!" His breath came in a heavy sigh. "I am not now so keen a hunter for my own. In God's hands is justice as well as mercy, and when Death throws down the warder I shall understand! In the meanwhile I await—I that speak to you now, and I that betrayed you four years agone."

He turned from the window, and the two again stood face to face. "I am a child at school," said Ferne. "There was a time when I thought to keep for bedfellow pride as well as shame; when I said, 'I am coward, I am traitor,' and put my lips to the cup of gall, but yet I drank it not with humility and a bowed heart. . . . I do not think, John, that I ever asked you to forgive me. . . . Forgive me!"

On the part of each there was an involuntary movement, an embrace, a locking of hands, deep silence, while the candles paled in the approaching dawn. At last Sir Mortimer spoke: "You will let me go now, John? There are many sick men down by the sea, and Robin will grow restless—perhaps will call my name aloud."

Arising from the window-seat, Nevil paced the room, then returned to the sometime Captain of the *Cygnet*. "Two things and I will let you go where you do the Queen and Francis Drake yeoman service. You will not slip a silken leash, but will abide with us in this town?"

"Ay," was the answer, "until your sick are recovered and your mariners are making sail I will stay."

Nevil hesitated. "For the present I accept your 'Until.' And now I ask you to throw off this disguise. We are men of a like height and make. Yonder within the chamber are suits from which you may choose. Pray you, dress at once."

A faint red swept into the other's countenance. "If I do as you bid, I may not go unrecognised. I say not, 'Spare me this, John Nevil!' I only ask, 'Is it wise?'

. . . Sir Francis Drake is commander here. Four years ago he swore that you were too merciful, that in your place he would have played hangsman to me more blithely than he played headsman to Thomas Doughty."

"I sail not under Francis Drake," Nevil answered. "Meeting me with two goodly ships at the Terceiras, he was fain enough to have me join my force to his. Over my own I hold command, and I shall claim you as my own. But you have no fear of Francis Drake! Is it your thought that your shield is for ever reversed, and that you are only welcome, only unashamed yonder where sickness stretches forth his hands, and Death gives back before you? If it is so, yet be that which you are—no Spanish friar, but English knight and gentleman. This garb becomes you not, who are yet a soldier of England. Away with it!"

The dawn began to show faint splendours, and the winds of morning drove aslant the candle flames. Ferne looked out over the dim sea to veiled horizons. "What matters it?" he said simply. "I will do what you wish, John. It were strange, were it not, if I refused you anything?" He passed Nevil with a smile, and the door of the inner

room closed upon him. Sir John, awaiting his return, began to quench the candles one by one, for there was no need of other light than the flooding dawn.

Some minutes had passed when a knock at the outward door interrupted his employment. Crossing the floor, he opened to Sir Francis Drake, who stood alone upon the threshold, his escort trampling down the stone stairs to the hall beneath. Nevil uttered an exclamation which the other met with his bluff, short laugh. "So you as well as I have let the jade Sleep slip by this night!" He brushed past Nevil into the room. "I gave it up an hour agone and am come to take counsel before breakfast. At the nooning Carlisle and Cecil will bring me the opinions of the captains, land and sea. I know already their conclusion and my answer. But I deny not that 'twill be a bitter draught." He did not take the great chair which Nevil indicated, but kept on to the window, where with a sound half sigh, half oath, he flung himself down upon the broad seat.

"I' faith, John Nevil! I know not why I am here, unless it be that you have more wisdom than most, and may somewhat

sweeten this course, which, mark you! I stand ready to take, or sweet or bitter, if thereby the Queen is best served. . . . The officer whom the Governor sent out days ago in search of these wealthy fugitives from the town—these rich people who starve on gold and silver dishes—has returned with some report or other as to the treasure. What think you if at this coming feast——"

Said Nevil abruptly: "Let us not speak of such matters here, Frank! I am fully dressed—let us go into the air!"

Drake stared. "And be observed of all that we hold counsel together! What's wrong with the room?" Glancing narrowly from wall to wall, he came suddenly to a realization of the presence of a third person —a stranger, dressed in some dark, rich stuff, who stood with folded arms against the door which he had closed behind him. Distinction of form, distinction of the quiet face, distinction of white hair, so incongruous and yet, strangely enough, the last and stateliest touch of all; after a moment of startled scrutiny Drake leaned forward, keen eyes beneath shaggy brows, one hand tugging at his beard. "Who are you, sir?" he asked.

Nevil interposed. "He is under my command, a volunteer for whom I alone am responsible."

The figure against the door advanced a pace or two. "I am Mortimer Ferne, Sir Francis Drake."

Drake, staring as at one just risen from the dead, got slowly to his feet. "Long ago," continued the apparition, "we had some slight acquaintance—but now 'tis natural that you know me not. . . . I pray you to believe me that until you drew near the window I thought Sir John Nevil alone in the room; moreover that I have heard no word of counsel, saving only the word itself."

"I hear you, sir," answered Drake icily. "Fair words and smooth—Oh, very courtier-like words! Oh, your very good assurance! but I choose my own assurance which dwells in the fact that naught has been said to which the Spaniard is not welcome!"

Nevil drew in his breath with a grieved, impatient sigh, but Sir Mortimer stood motionless, nor seemed to care to find answering words. The blood had mounted to his brow, but the eyes which gazed past the speaker into the magnificent heart of the dawn were very clear, very patient.

Moments passed while Drake, the great sea captain, sat, striking his booted foot upon the floor, looking from Nevil, who had regained his usual calm, to the man with whom oblivion had no more to do. Suddenly he spoke. "You are he who in the guise of a Spanish friar hath nursed our sick? Give you thanks! . . . Which of your ships, John Nevil, do you make over to this—this gentleman?"

Nevil, drawing himself up, would have answered with haughtiness, but with a quick gesture of entreaty Ferne himself took the word. "Sir Francis Drake—Sir John Nevil—he said, "I pray that, because of me, you come not to cold words and looks which sort not with your noble friendship! I shall never again, Sir Francis Drake, command any ship whatsoever, hold any office, be other than I am, a man so broken, so holpen by Almighty God, that he needs not earthly praise or blame. . . . I have a servant ill within the camp who will fret at my absence. Wilt let me begone, John? But you must first explain to the sergeant this my transformation. Sir Francis Drake, so long as you tarry in Cartagena I submit myself to whatever restriction, whatsoever surveillance

you and my former Admiral may determine."

"I will let you go but for a time," Nevil answered firmly. "Later, I shall send for you and Robin to some fitter lodging." He turned to Drake. Frank Drake, I but give once again to all our sick, the man to whom, under God, is owed this abatement of the fever. I pray you to await me here while I myself deliver him to the sergeant below. It is necessary, for he entered this room in disguise, who goes forth clad again as an English gentleman. Then will I tell you a story which I think that, four years agone, may have been given you rather by a man's foes than by his friends—and another story of deep repentance and of God's path, which is not our path; and Francis Drake hath indeed changed over-night if he make of this a quarrel between him and John Nevil, or if he be not generously moved toward this gentleman, whom I count as my friend and follower."

"I will wait," said Drake, after a pause. "Give you good day, sir. Your service to our sick is known, and for it our thanks are due. At the present I can say no more."

Ferne bowed in silence, then with Nevil

left the room for the hall below, where the startled sergeant and his men saluted indeed Sir John Nevil, but kept their eyes upon the figure at his side.

Nevil beckoning to the sergeant, drew off a few paces and gave in a lowered voice instructions to be borne to Captain Powell. Then the one knight mounted to the room where Drake awaited him, and the other went, guarded, through the tropic morn to the fevered and the restless, who yearned for him as the sick may yearn, and to the hut where Arden strove to restrain Robin-a-dale's cries for his master.

CHAPTER XII

DURING the afternoon came an order to Captain Powell that the sick youth should be taken to Sir Mortimer Ferne's apartment in the house where lodged Master Arden. Thus it was that in the cooler air before sunset a litter was borne through the streets of Cartagena. In addition to the bearers and some other slight attendance there walked with it Sir John Nevil and Captain Powell, Giles Arden and Sir Mortimer Ferne. Sometimes the latter laid his hand upon the youth's burning forehead, sometimes a finger upon the lips which would have babbled overmuch. Bearers and escort stared and stared. One who had been about the spital and had seen a brother brought from under the shadow of death, repeatedly stumbled because he could not take his eyes from the friar become English gentleman —become friend of so great a gentleman as Sir John Nevil.

The little procession turned one corner,

then another ; Sir Mortimer touched Nevil's arm. "There's a shorter way—down this narrow street we are passing."

"Ay," Nevil answered, "but let us go by way of the market-place."

His thought was that none too soon could occur general recognition that Sir Mortimer Ferne dwelt in the English camp and walked with English leaders. The square, as it proved, was no desert. The hour was one of some relaxation, relief from the sun, and from the iron discipline of Drake, who for the most part of the day created posts and kept men at them. Carlisle was there seated in the shade of a giant palm, watching the drilling of a yet weak and staggering company, whose very memory that burning calenture had enfeebled. At one side of the place, which was not large, others were examining a great heap of booty, the grosser spoils of rich men's houses, furniture of precious woods, gilt and inlaid cabinets, chests of costly apparel, armour, weapons, trappings of horses, all awaiting under guard, assortment and division. In the centre of the square a score or more of adventurers were gathered about the wide steps of a great stone market-cross, while from a point opposite to the street by

which the party from the hospital must make entry, advanced with some clanking of steel, talking, and sturdy laughter, no lesser men than Francis Drake and some of his chiefest captains. Carlisle left watching the drilling and walked over to them. The adventurers lounging below the cross sprang up to greet their Admiral. A sudden puff of evening wind lifted Drake's red cap and, bearing it across to a small battery where a gunner and his mates examined a line of Spanish ordnance, placed it neatly over the muzzle of the smallest gun. Frank laughter arose; the gunner, with the red cap pressed against his hairy breast, and grinning with pleasure at his service, came at a run to restore to the great Sir Francis his property. Drake, whom the mere soldier and mariner idolized, found for the gunner both a peso of silver and jesting thanks, then when he had donned the cap turned and loudly called to the passing company. "Come over to us, John Nevill," cried the sea king. "No, no; let us have your companions also, and that sick youth we have heard of."

"You do not understand," muttered Ferne hastily to Nevil. "This place likes me not. Go you and Arden——"

Sir John shook his head. Alone with Drake that morning he had told in its completeness the story that in many details was strange to him who was seldom in England, seldomer at Court, and who had heard the story in a form which left scant room for pity or any dream of absolution. Once and again the great sea captain had softly sworn to himself, and at the end Nevil had gone forth satisfied. Now he saw that Drake must have timed this meeting in the square, and with a smile he ignored the entreaty in the eyes of the man who, if his friend, was also his captive. He motioned to the bearers and presently the company about the market-cross was enlarged.

Drake, after his hearty fashion, clapped his arm about Sir John's shoulder, calling him "Dear Nevil." Arden, with whom he had slighter acquaintance he also greeted, while Powell was his "good Powell, his trusty Anthony." There was a slight shifting in the smaller group, Nevil by a backward step or two bringing into line the man who stood beside the litter. Drake turned. "Give you God' den, Sir Mortimer Ferne! Our hearty thanks, moreover, for the good service you have done us."

He spoke loudly, that all might hear. If beneath the bluff good fellowship of word and voice there was any undercurrent of coldness or misliking, only one or two, beside the man who bowed to him in silence, might guess it. By now every man about the market cross was at attention. Rumours had been rife that day. Neither at home in England, nor here in Spanish dominions, was there English soldier or sailor who knew not name and record of Sir Mortimer Ferne. Among the adventurers about the market-cross were not lacking men who in old days had viewed, admired, envied, and for final tribute contemned him. These broke ranks, pressing as closely as was mannerly toward the group about the litter. All gaped at Drake's words of amity, at Sir John Nevil's grave smile, and Carlisle's friendly face, but most of all at that one who had been the peer of great captains, but who now stood amongst them undetached, ghost-like, a visitant from the drear world of the dishonoured dead. The palm-trees edging the square began to wave and rustle in the wind; the youth upon the litter moved restlessly, uttering moaning and incomprehensible words. Drake was speaking to Arden and others of his captains.

"What ails you?" murmured Nevil at Ferne's ear. "There is sweat upon your forehead, and you hold yourself as rigid as the dead. Your touch is icy cold."

"I burn," answered the other in as low a tone. "Let us go hence."

Nevil motioned to the bearers, who raised the litter and began again their progress across the square. Drake turned from those to whom he had been speaking. "Will ye be going? You shall sup with us to-night, John Nevil! Master Arden, I do desire your better acquaintance. Captain Powell, you will stay with me who have some words for your ear. Sir Mortimer Ferne, I trust you will recover your servant, as you have recovered so many of our poor fellows." His voice dropped until it was audible only to the three or four who made his immediate circle, "As you have well-nigh recovered yourself."

Generous as he was he had not meant to go so far. He had yet his doubts, his reversions in mind to those sheer facts which none denied. This was a recreant knight—but also a man who had suffered long and greatly, who, if eye and intuition could be trusted, suffered now. He hesitated a moment, then abruptly held out his hand.

All saw the gesture, and a sudden hush fell upon the company. If these two touched hands, then in that moment would be spanned the distance between the star in the ascendant and the wavering marsh light, between the sea Colossus and his onetime rival, now so long overwhelmed and chained to sterile earth.

In the short silence the wind seemed to take with a rushing sound the palm tops overhead. Then Ferne spoke. "With all my heart I thank you," he said. "I may not take your hand until you know——" he raised his voice so that all who chose might hear, "until you know that here where I stand, here before this cross, died in the torment of fire that Captain Robert Baldry who was my private foe, who lay beneath my challenge, whom I betrayed to his agony and to his martyr's death. . . . Ah! I will hold you excused, Sir Francis Drake!"

With the deep exclamation, the involuntary recoil that followed on the heels of such an avowal, there appeared to descend upon the place a dark shadow, a veritable pall, a faint murk of driven smoke through which men saw to-day the spectacle of nigh four years agone. . . . The silence was broken, the spell dissolved by Robin-a-dale's feeble cry from

the litter. "Master, master; come with me, master!"

Drake, who with a quick intake of his breath had drawn sharply back, was the first to recover. He sent his lightning glance from the frowning, the deeply flushed and horror-stricken countenances about him, to the man whose worn cheek showed no colour, whose lips were locked, whose eyes were steadfast though a little lifted to the blue sky above the cross. "Now, death of my life!" swore the sea king. "The knave did well to call you, 'Master.' Whatever there may have been, here is now no coward!" He turned to the staring, whispering throng. "Gentlemen, we will remove from this space, which was the deathbed of a brave man and a true martyr. This done, each man of you will go soberly about his business, remembering that God's dealings are not those of men; remembering also that this gentleman is under my protection." Doffing his red cap, he stepped slowly backward out of the wide ring about the market-cross. His example was followed by all; a few moments and the last rays of the sinking sun lay only upon bare stone and earth.

Some hours later, Robin-a-dale asleep in

the bed, and his master keeping motionless watch at the window, Arden entered the room which had been assigned to Sir Mortimer Ferne, and crossing the floor sat himself down beside his friend. Presently Ferne put forth his hand, and the two sat with interlacing fingers, looking out upon the great constellations. Arden was the first to speak.

"Dost remember how when we were boys at school, and the curfew long rung, we yet knelt at our window and saw the stars come up over the moorland? Thou wert the poet and teller of tales—ah! thy paladins and paynims and ladies enchanted! while I listened, bewitched as they, but with an ear for the master's tread. It was a fearful joy!"

"I remember," said the other. "It was a trick of mine which too often brought the cane across our shoulders."

"Not mine," quoth Arden. "You always begged me off. I was the smallest—you waked me—made me listen, forsooth! . . . Well-a-day! Old times seem near to-night!"

"Old times," repeated the other. "Pictures that creep beneath the shut eyelid!—frail sounds that outcry the storm!—Shame's most delicate, most exquisite goad! . . . You

cannot know how strange this day has been to me."

"You cannot know how glad this day has been to me," replied Arden with a break in his voice. "Do you remember, Mortimer, that I would have sailed with you in the *Sea Wraith?*"

"I forget nothing," said the other. "I think that I reviled you then. . . . See how far hath swung my needle!" He lifted his schoolfellow's hand to his cheek in a long mute caress, then, laying it down: "There is one at home of whose welfare I would learn. She is not dead, I know. Her brother comes to me in my dreams with all the rest—with all the rest—but she comes not. Speak to me of Mistress Damaris Sedley."

A short pause, then, "She is the fairest and the loveliest," said Arden. "Her beauty is a fadeless flower, but her eyes hold a history it were hard to read without a clue. One only knows the tale is tragical. She is most gentle, sweet, and debonair. The thorns of Fortune's giving she has twisted into a crown and she wears it royally. I saw her at Wilton six months ago."

"At Wilton! With the Queen?"

"No; she left the Court long ago. You

and the *Sea Wraith* were scarce a month gone when that grim old knight, her guardian, would have made for her a marriage with some spendthrift sprig of more inches than wits. But Sidney, working through Walsingham and his uncle Leicester, purchased her wardship from her guardian, then with his own golden speech got from the Queen consent to her retirement from Court. With a very noble retinue he brought her to his sister at Wilton, where, with that most noble Countess, she abides in sanctuary. When you take her hence——"

Sir Mortimer laughed. "When I take the rainbow from the sky—when I leap to meet the moon and find that silver damsel in my arms indeed—when yonder sea hath washed away all the blood of the earth—when I find Ponce de Leon's spring and speak to the nymph within. Now free me from this year, and this, and this, and this! Make me the man that once I was! Then will I go to Wilton."

He rose and paced the room once or twice, then came back to Arden at the window. "Old schoolfellow, we are not boys now. There be no enchanters; and the giant hugs himself in his tower nor will come forth at

any challenge; and the dragon hath so shrunken that he shows no larger than a man's self—all illusion's down! . . . I thank thee for thy news of a lady whom I love. I am full glad to know that she is in health and safety, among old friends, honoured, beloved, fairer than the fairest——" His voice shook, and for a moment he bowed his face within his hands, but repression came immediately to his command. He raised his head and began again with a quiet voice: "I shall write to her a letter, and you will be its bearer —will you not, old friend? riding with it by the green fields and the English oaks to noble Wilton——"

"And where, when the ships have brought us home, do you go, Mortimer?"

"To the Low Countries. Seeing that I go as a private soldier, John Nevil may easily gain me leave. And thou, Giles, I know, will give me money with which I may arm me and may cross to the English camp. I am glad that Philip Sidney becomes my General. Although I fight afoot, in the long trenches or with the pikemen and the harquebusiers, yet may I joy to look upon him, flashing past, all gilded like Saint George, with the great banner flying, leading the wild charge—the shouts of his horsemen behind him——"

Arden sprang to his feet, pushed the heavy settle aside, and with a somewhat disordered step went over to the bed where lay Robin-a-dale.

"He will recover?" he asked in a low voice, as Ferne came to his side.

"Ay, I think so," answered the other. "He will sleep throughout the night, and the morn should find him stronger, more clear in mind. . . . I am going now to the spital—no, no; I need no rest and I have leave to come and go."

The two descended together to the door of the great hall, whence Ferne went his solitary way and Arden stood to watch him out of sight. As the latter turned again to the house he was aware of a small band of men, English and Spanish, proceeding from Drake's lodging toward the citadel, which, robbed of all ordnance and partly demolished, yet sheltered the Governor, his officers, and sundry Spanish gentlemen. To-day the envoy from the wealthy fugitives and owners of buried gold had returned and, evidently, to-night Drake and the Spanish commissioners had again discussed the matter of ransom.

Arden, within the shadow, watched the

little torchlit company of English soldiery and Spanish officials cross his plane of vision, There was some talking and laughter; an Englishman made a jest and a Spaniard answered with a proverb. The latter's voice struck some chord in Arden's memory, but struck it faintly. "Now where have I heard that voice?" he asked, but found no answer. The noise and the light passed onward to the citadel, and with a brief good-night to a passing sentinel, he himself, re-entered the house.

The next day at noon, Ferne, deliberately, though with white lips and half-closed eyelids, crossing the market-square, sought out Sir John Nevil's quarters. By the soldiers in the great hall he was told that Sir John was with the Admiral—would he wait? He nodded, and sat himself down upon a settle in the hall. The guard and those who came and went eyed him curiously; sometimes whispered words reached his ears. Once when he had waited a long time a soldier brought him a jack of ale. He drank of it gratefully and thanked the donor. The soldier fidgetted, lowered his voice. "I fought under you, Sir Mortimer Ferne, at Fayal in the Azores. You brought us that

day out of the jaws of death, and we swore you were too much for Don or devil! and we drank to you that evening, full measure of ale! and we took our oath that we had served far and near under many a captain, but none like you——"

Ferne smiled. "Was it so, soldier? Well, may I drink to you now who drank to me then?"

He drew the ale toward him but kept his eyes upon the other's countenance. The man reddened from brow to bared throat, but his words came at once, and there was moisture in his blue eyes.

"If my old captain will do me so much honour——" he began unsteadily.

Ferne with a smile raised the jack to his lips and drank to him health and happy life and duty faithfully done.

When the man, after stammered thanks, was gone, the other waited hour after hour the appearance of Sir John Nevil. At last he came striding down the hall to the stair, but, moving suddenly when he caught sight of Ferne, crossed to the settle, and gave him quiet greeting.

"Sir Francis kept me over long," he said. "How has gone thy day, Mortimer?"

"The fever lessens," answered the other. "There are not many now will die. . . . May I speak to you where there are fewer eyes?"

A few moments later, in Sir John's own room, he took from his doublet a slip of paper. "This was brought to me some hours ago. Is it an order?"

"Ay," said Nevil, without touching the outheld paper. "An order."

Ferne walked to the window and stood there, looking out upon the passers-by in the street below. One and all seemed callow souls who had met neither angel nor devil, heard neither the thunder-bolt nor the still small voice. Desperately weary, set to a task which appalled him, he felt again the sting of a lash to which he had thought himself inured. There was a longing upon him that this insistent probing of his wound should cease. Better the Indians and the fearful woods, and Death ever a tip-toe! better the stupendous strife of the lonely soul to maintain its dominion, to say to overtoppling nature, to death and to despair, *I am.* There was no man who could help the soul. . . . This earthly propping of a withered plant, this drawing of tattered arras over a blood-stained wall, what was it to the matter? For the

moment all his being was for black, star-touching mountains, for the wild hurry of league-long rapids, the calling and crying of the forest; the next he turned again to the room with some quiet remark as to the apparent brewing of a storm in the western skies. Nevil turned upon him a troubled look.

"It was my wish, Mortimer, to which Drake gave ready assent. It is, as you see, an order for your presence to-night with other gentlemen volunteers at this great banquet with which the Spaniard takes his leave of us. Shall I countermand it?"

"No," answered the other. "My duty is to you. I could not pay my debt if I strove for ever and a day. You are my Captain—when you order I obey."

A silence followed, during which Sir Mortimer stood at the window and Sir John paced the floor. At last the former spoke lightly. "There will be a storm to-night. . . . I must comfort that knave of mine. At times he doth naught but babble of things at home—at Ferne House. This morn it was winter to him, and in this burning land he talked of snowflakes falling beneath the yuletide stars; yea, and when he had spoken pertly

to the sexton he would go a-carrolling—

> 'There comes a ship far sailing then,
> Saint Michael was the steersman,
> Saint John sate in the Horn,
> Our Lord harped; our Lady sang,
> Over all the bells of heaven rang.' "

He sang the verse lightly, as simply and sweetly as Robin had sung it, then with a smile, turned to go; and in passing Nevil laid a slight, caressing touch upon his shoulder. "Until to-night, then, John; and by're Lady, seeing that you will be at the top of the board and I at the bottom, I do think that I may hear nothing worth betraying."

Sir John uttered an ejaculation, and would have taken again the folded paper, but the other withstood him, and quietly went his way to kneel beside Robin-a-dale, give up his hand to tears and kisses (for Robin was very weak and knew not why his master left him so long alone), and gently seemed to listen to the noiseless fall of the snow, deep, deep, upon the roof tree that he had sold.

Sir Francis Drake and Alonzo Brava had come to a mind in regard to the ransom for the town. If the English gained not so large a sum as they hoped for, yet theirs was the glory of the enterprise, and Drake's eye was

yet upon Nombre de Dios. If the Spaniard had lost money and men and had looked on day by day at the slow dilapidation of their city, yet they had riches left, and the life of the Spanish soldier was cheap, and that ruined portion of the town might be built again. Agreements had been drawn as to the ransom of the city of Cartagena and signed by each leader, by Brava with the pious (but silent) wish that the fleet might be miraculously destroyed before the drying of the ink; and by Drake with one of his curious mental reservations, concerning in this case the blockhouse and the great priory just without the city. Matters being thus settled, and the next morning named for the English evacuation of Cartagena needs must pass the usual courtesies between the stateliest people of Christendom and the bluntest. Alonzo Brava, in all honesty, invited to supper with him in his dismantled citadel Sir Francis Drake, Sir John Nevil, and all officers and gentlemen within the English forces. Drake as frankly accepted the courtesy for himself and all who might be spared from the final labours of the night.

In the harbour, throughout the sultry day, the English ships made ready to sail;

the gold was aboard, mariners and soldiers, half-naked, panting and sweating, had drawn from the city to the sea nigh three score pieces of Spanish ordnance. Now in the late evening, by a stormy light, seen through the high wide and open windows, seemed to pit itself against the approaching darkness. Brava, motioning to right and left, seated himself with his principal guests at the table of honour, which was raised upon a slight daïs, while his chamberlains busied themselves with serving the turn of the lesser dignitaries where precedence must not be aggrieved. Captains and officers, gentlemen and volunteers of wealth and birth fell into place, with the farther end of the table left for needy adventurers, scapegrace, and out-at-elbow volunteers. Noiseless attendants went to and fro. Great numbers of candles were lighted, but the prolonged orange glare which entered the western windows seemed to have some quality distinct from light, by virtue of which men's features were not clearly seen. Distant thunder rolled, but when it passed one heard from the gallery above the hall Spanish music, fanfares of trumpets, plaints of stringed instruments, and barbaric clangour of cymbals. The feast

marched on in triumph, much as it might have done in any camp (where Famine was not king), beneath any flag of truce. Here the viands were in quantity, and there was wine to spill even after friend and foe had been loudly pledged. Free men, sea-rovers, and soldiers of fortune, it was for them no courtier's banquet. Only the presence at table of their leaders kept the wassail down. Now and again the thunder shook the hall, making all sounds beneath its own as the shrilling of a cicada ; then, the long roll past, the music took new heart, while below it went on the laughter and the soldier wit, babble of sore wounds, of camp fires and high-decked ships, tales wild and grim or broadly humorous. At the cross-table opposite, and a little below Sir John Nevil, who was seated at Brava's left hand, was a vacant seat. It awaited (the Governor explained) the envoy whom he had sent out to hardly gather the remainder of the ransom of Cartagena. The length, the heat and danger of the journey had outwearied the envoy, who was a gentleman of as great a girth as spirit. Later, despite his indisposition, he would join them.

He came, and it was Pedro Mexia. From

Nevil and Arden and several of Sir John's old officers of the *Mere Honour* burst more or less suppressed exclamations. Nevil from his vantage point sent a lightning glance far down the table, where were gathered those whose rank or station barely brought them within this hall, but what with the massed fruit, the candles, this or that outstretched hand and shoulder, he could not see to the lowest at the table, and he heard no sound to match his own or Arden's ejaculation. Mexia, who lingered with his own wine cup and associates, now after the moment of general welcome, seated himself heavily. His first gaze had been naturally for Francis Drake, the man whose name was waxing ever louder in Spanish ears, but now in the act of raising his tankard his eyes and those of the sometime conqueror of Nueva Cordoba came together. For a second his hand shook, then he tossed off the wine, and putting down his tankard with some noise, leaned half-way across the table.

"Ha! we meet again, Sir John Nevil; and after four years of mortal life we be a-ransoming yet! You see I have not lost your tongue—although I lost my teachers!" He laughed at the tag to his speech, being

drunk enough to make utter mischief out of sheer good nature.

"Doth Master Francis Sark still teach you English?" asked Nevil coldly.

"Francis Sark—who is Francis Sark?" maundered the fuddled envoy. "There was the fool Desmond, who overreached himself trying to bargain with Luiz de Guardiola. Those who do that meet strange fates!"

Arden, from a place or two below, put in lightly: "Well, our Sark equals your Desmond. And so he bargained with Don Luiz de Guardiola?"

Mexia's eyes wandered to the other's face. "Ha, señor! I remember your face at Nueva Cordoba! Have we here more of our conquered?" His speech began with the pomp of the frog in the fable, but at this point became maudlin again, and returned to the one-time Governor of Nueva Cordoba's dealings with his creatures. "Why, Desmond was a fool to name such a price—one hundred pesos, perhaps—but four thousand! But Don Luiz smiled and paid down the silver, and the fool told all things and was hanged for his pains." Up went his tankard to his lips, and as it descended wine was spilt upon his neighbour's sleeve. The victim drew

away with a smothered oath, and Brava eyed with displeasure his drunken associate.

"Why for what could the man ask such price?" Arden asked with light surprise. In a moment the other's large and vacuous countenance became sober enough. "For a trap to catch flies," he said shortly, and, turning his shoulder to all but the men of highest rank, again wetted his throat, then let his empty tankard touch the board with a clattering sound. From the first he had drawn attention, and now at the drumming of the tankard most faces turned his way. Nevil spoke to Drake beneath his breath, the latter, bending towards Alonza Brava, addressed him in a very low tone. Brava, deeply annoyed on the point of signalling his servitors quietly to persuade from the table his drunken guest, listened though still frowningly. A final whisper from Drake:

"In no way toucheth your honour, a private matter—favours—ransom——" The Governor, leaning forward, playing with his wine, gave some sign of acquiescence; perhaps, indeed, may have had his own indifferences to any blackening of the character of Don Luiz de Guardiola, now flourishing at Madrid like a green bay tree.

Mexia was displaying profound skill in the nice balancement of his tankard as the servant behind him refilled the measure.

"Ha, Don Pedro!" said Drake with his bluff laugh, "art on that four-years-gone matter of Nueva Cordoba? Methinks Sir John Nevil brought off a knightly sufficiency of credit——"

"Sir John Nevil! Oh! Ay!" said Mexia, and with both hands carefully lowered the tankard to the level of the table. "Did Sir Mortimer Ferne bring forth such a—what's the word?—knightly sufficiency? Now I've often wondered—'tis true I had my grudge against him also, but in such matters I go not so far as De Guardiola, who brands the soul. . . . I told Don Luiz as much four years ago. 'Why I kill my man,' quoth I, 'and go on my way singing.'"

"And what said he to that?" queried Arden lightly, and easily drawing on Mexia, who, in his cups, became merely a garrulous old man.

"Why," continued the envoy, "he said, 'Mayhap the dead do not remember. So live my foe! but live in hell, remembering the brand upon thy soul, and that 'twas I who set it glowing there'!"

A murmur rang the length of the table. Mexia suddenly found himself of a steadier brain with somewhat stronger interest in rencontres new or old. "Ha! Sir Mortimer Ferne and his knot of velvet! Don Luiz ground *that* beneath his heel. . . . Well, the man's dead, no doubt. I've wondered more than once if he lived or died; if he beat out his brains as he strove to do; if, thinking better o't, he merely held his tongue and nursed his broken body; or if he cried aloud that which the old serpent De Guardiola made him believe, and henceforth travelled life's highway a lazar! . . . And that's a curious thought: leper to himself—leper to his world—leper's cry—leper's mantle, with the cloth across his face—and beneath it, all cleanliness, with not a soul but God to know it!" He gave his small, chuckling laugh. "Oh, I, too, have thoughts; I, too, watch the play—Pedro Mexia, señors, is not so gross of wit as he is thought to be!"

Nevil leaned across the table. "Leper to himself, and to his world! but to God all cleanly beneath that mantle which he drew over his forehead and his eyes! What do you mean? Sir Mortimer Ferne declares himself a coward and a traitor!"

"So!" said Mexia. "Well! 'Twas falsely sworn. Desmond was the man."

Sir John turned with a rapid speech to his host. Alonza Brava addressed Mexia, who roused himself to a fair appearance of sobriety. "Worthy, Don Pedro, all here, on both sides, have heard somewhat of this story. I understand that the English hidalgo concerned is dead. Don Luiz de Guardiola is in Spain. We all know that a simple vengeance never sufficed for him who was of those who by their cruelties have brought such defamation upon our name in the Indies. I see not that you do injury to Spanish honour by giving to our friends of one night as much as you know of this history."

"Your relation will make us so greatly your debtor, Don Pedro," said Drake, "that to-morrow, ere we sail, we will think of some such token as may justly show our appreciation of the trouble we now give you. Wilt drink with me?"

The tankards clinked, the wine went down, and the flattered Mexia turned his round empurpled countenance to Nevil. "Why, see you," he said, "'twas easy for Desmond to find the secret door in the upper room of the friar's house, and, stealing down by the

stair between the walls, to listen at the hidden grating until he had by heart your every plan—but 'twas not so easy to escape to us! It lacked half an hour of sunset when he brought that news which since noon Don Luiz had sought with fury to wring from the other."

"From the other?"

"From Sir Mortimer Ferne."

An Englishman cried out, "Then were there two traitors?" but Mexia, who by now was somewhat in love with his part of raconteur, had a grim smile. "There was one Don Luiz de Guardiola. . . . Oh, I will tell you what you wish to know, señors! Be not so impatient. It was without the room where lay his prisoner that he gathered from Desmond news indeed; and it was from that room that he sent Desmond away, and wrote very swiftly order after order to his lieutenants. Then he went to the other door and called out Miguel, who says, 'Now and then he raves, but nothing to the point!' to which Don Luiz: 'I am going to stand beside him. You are skilful. Make him babble like a child, scarce knowing what he says. What I wanted from him matters no longer; but make him speak—words, broken sentences,

cries!—I care not what. Make him aware that he holds his tongue no longer, make him strugggle for silence there beneath my eyes.'"

"'He calls on God at present,' answers Miguel. 'I thought these Lutherans held with Satan.'"

"'When I sign to you—thus,'" goes on De Guardiola, 'bring him with suddenness into a short swoon. Then at once dash water upon his face and breast. When he cometh to himself, which (look you) must be shortly, busy yourself with putting away your engines, or be officious to loosen his bonds, keeping a smiling mien as of one whose day's work is done—in short, in what subtle fashion you may, do you and your helpers add to that assurance that I myself shall give him. Do your part well and there will be reward, for I have at heart a whim that I would gratify.' So we went into the next room."

"We!" said Nevil, "and, by God, this man was there!" breathed Drake, and Arden ground his teeth. The silence which had spellbound the company broke sharply here or there, then, breathless, men again bent forward, waiting for the last word of the story whose ending they already guessed.

Alonza Brava, a knightly soul enough, sat grim and red, repentant that he had given loose rein to Mexia's tongue. Mexia, undisturbed, genial with his wine, and of a retrospective turn of mind, went smoothly, even dreamily on with his episode of a four-years-past struggle. He had scarcely noticed the slip of the tongue by which he had included himself with Luiz de Guardiola and his ministers.

"Well. . . . He lay there indeed, and called upon God—and now and then he cried to men and women we knew not of. But when he saw that De Guardiola was in the room, he fell silent—like that!"

"Tell me this—and this—and this," says Don Luiz at his side. "Then shall you go free. You are your Admiral's dearest friend; you are high in the English council. Even before you became my prisoner was there not a general attack planned for to-night? Tell me its nature and the hour. What force will be left upon the ships? What will be the word of the night? Tell me if you know aught of a secret way by which the battery may be flanked!"

"Well, he was silent, and Don Luiz stamped upon the floor. 'You are too slow

of speech, señor. Miguel, make him speak. I have no time to loiter here!' "

Mexia moistened his lips with his wine. "What do you ask with your white faces and great eyes, señors? . . . Oh, yes, he was made to speak — to cry out to the Lutheran's God, to gasp his defiance to Don Luiz waiting with folded arms!—to wander, as they sometimes do, thinking friends about him, making appeal to the living and the dead to pluck him out of hell! At last, with froth upon his lips, to murmur like a child who knows not war nor one of its usages, like a heretic who communes with God direct. . . . I am no better than I am, but I know courage when I see it, and I tell you, Don Alonzo, that in his torment and his weakness that man was strong to sweep clear his mind of aught that was to De Guardiola's purpose. If nature must give voice to her anguish, then, with bound hands, he kept her far from the garden of his honour. This until the very last, when he lost knowledge indeed, of what the tongue might say, and bit at his bound arms struggling to hold his peace. Then De Guardiola signed for the turn of the screw."

At the end of the table, a few moments before, a man had left his place with no

noise, and, stooping, was now making his way behind the forward-bent row of guests, toward the table of honour. Mexia, making full stop, drank his wine, and leaning back in his chair, stared thoughtfully before him. Amongst his auditors there was an instant of breathless expectation, then Drake cried impatiently, "Make a finish, man!"

"There is no more," said Mexia. "He never told, never betrayed. When he awoke from that momentary swoon there was surcease of torment, there were Miguel and his fellows making ready to take leave of the day's work; his bonds were loosed, wine held to his lips; Don Luiz stood over him with a smile, and still smiling sent for the Commandant of the battery. All that Desmond had brought to Don Luiz was told over, orders were written and sent in haste, naught was left undone that De Guardiola's guile might suggest. He believed—he could not choose but to believe—that in his madness of words and half conscious utterances, from very failure of will and weakness of soul and lack of knightly honour, he had refused to endure, and had betrayed the English to surprise and death."

The man who had moved from his seat

was now so near to the notable guests that when, drawing himself up, he placed his hand upon Arden's shoulders, he came face to face with Pedro Mexia. The latter, uttering a strangled cry, threw up his hands as though to ward off an apparition. With a sudden spring, one booted foot upon Arden's heavy chair, the figure leaped upon the table, disarranging all its glittering array, and for a second facing the company, which had arisen with excitement and outcry. The next, like a dart, he crossed the intervening space and threw himself upon Mexia, dragging the bulky form from the table and hurling it to the floor. Weaponless, the assaulter had used his hands, and now with a knee upon Mexia's breast he strove to throttle him. When, Spanish and English, those that were nearest to Don Alonzo's guests were upon him, the face that he turned over his shoulder showed an intolerable white fury of wrath. "Thy sword, John Nevil!" he gasped. "Thou seest I wear none! Arden, thou'rt no friend of mine if thou flingst me not thy dagger! . . . Ah dog! that companied with the hell hound of the pack, loll *thy* tongue out now, let *thy* eyeballs start from the socket——"

When the two men were separated the one lay huddled and unconscious against his chair; and the other stood with iron composure, glancing from the unconscious envoy to his host Alonzo Brava. "I know not who you are, señor," spoke the latter, with anger hardly controlled, "but you have broken truce and done bodily injury to my guest—who not being able at the moment to speak for himself——"

"Your pardon, señor, for any discourtesy towards my host," answered Ferne. "And I would give you satisfaction here and now if—if——" He looked down upon his empty hands. The gesture was seen of all. Made by him, it came as one of those slight acts which have a power to pierce the heart and enlighten the understanding. Unconscious as it was, the movement rent away the veil of four years, broke any remnant of the spell that was upon the English, set him high and clear before them—the peer of Francis Drake, of John Nevil, of Raleigh, and of Sidney. This was Sir Mortimer Ferne, and there was that which he lacked! Up and down the room there ran a sudden sound of steel drawn swiftly from metal, leather, or velvet sheaths. "My sword,

Sir Mortimer Ferne!"—"Mine!"—"And mine!"—"Do mine honour, Sir Mortimer Ferne!" "Sir Mortimer Ferne, take mine!"

Ferne's hand closed upon the hilt which Nevil had silently offered, and he turned to salute his antagonist whose pallor now matched his own. "Are you that English knight?" demanded Brava with dry lips. "Then in courtesy alone will we cross blades—no more!"

The steel clashed, the points fell, and Spaniard and Englishman bowed gravely each to the other. "I thank you," said Ferne hoarsely. "With your permission, señor, I will say good night. You will understand, I think, that I would be alone."

"That we must all understand," said Alonzo Brava. "Our good wishes travel with you, señor."

Sir Mortimer turned, and from the younger, more heedless adventurers broke a singing shout, a repeated calling of his name until it echoed from the lofty roof, but his friends spoke not to him, only made an aisle through which he might pass. His arm was raised, Nevil's sword a gleaming line along the dark velvet of his sleeve. The face seen below the lifted arm was very strange, written

over with a thousand meanings. The poise of the figure, and the light upon the sword, increased the effect of height, the effect of the one-night-whitened hair. There was, moreover, the gleam and shadow of the countenance, evident forgetfulness of time or place, the desire of the soul to be out with night and storm and miracles. The English drew farther back, and he went by them like an apparition.

Later in the night Nevil and Arden, after fruitless search, came upon a space where the wall of Cartagena rose sheer above the water. To-night the sea roared in their ears, but the storm had gone by, leaving upon the horizon a black and rugged bank of cloud rimmed by great beacon stars. Down through a wide rift in the clouds streamed light from a haloed moon. Beneath it, seated upon the stone, his hands clasped about his knees and a gleaming sword laid across them was the man they sought. His head was lifted, and the moon gave light enough by which to read the lineaments of a good knight and true, brave, of stainless honour, a lover of things of good repute, pure gold to his friends, generous to his foes, gentle to the weak, tender and

pitiful of all who sinned or suffered. He heard their footsteps on the stone and, rising, went to meet them. "It hath been a wonderful night," he said. "Look, how great is the ring about the moon! and the air after the storm blows from far countries. . . . They have come to me one after another —all the men of the *Cygnet*, and the *Phœnix*, and the land force. Henry Sedley sate beside me, with his arm about my shoulder, and Captain Robert Baldry and I have clasped hands, foregoing our quarrel. And the crew of the *Sea Wraith* went by like shadows. I know not if I did wrongly by them, but if it be so, I will abide God's judgment between us when I, too, am dead. And I am not yet for the Low Countries. Arden! I am for England—England—England!"

They leaned against the parapet and looked out upon the now gleaming sea, the rack of the clouds and the broken cohorts of the stars. They looked out to the glistening line where the water met the east. "Homeward to-morrow!" said Arden, and Ferne asked, "What are thy ships, John?" and Nevil answered, "The one is the *Mere Honour*, the other I have very lately re-named

the *Cygnet*. Wilt be her Captain, Mortimer, from here to Plymouth Port ? "

The Countess of Pembroke, in mourning for her parents, was spending a midsummer month in leafy Penshurst. It was a drowsy month, of roses fully blown and heavy lilies, of bees booming amongst all honey flowers, of shady copses and wide sunlit fields—and it was a quiet month because of the Countess's mourning and because Philip Sidney was Governor of Flushing. Therefore, save for now and then a messenger bringing news from London or Wilton or from that loved brother in the Netherlands, the Countess, her women and a page or two, made up the company at Penshurst. The pages and the young gentlewomen (all under the eye of an aged major domo) moved sedately in the old house, pacing soberly the gardens beneath the open casements ; but when they reached the sweet rusticity of the outward ways, fruit-dropping orchards, and sunny spaces, they were for lighter spirits, heels, and wits. With laughter young hand caught at young hand, and fair forms circled swiftly an imaginary maypole. Tall flowers upon the Medway's brim

next took their eye, and they gathered pink and white and purple sheaves; then, bitten by the mere joy of work, caught up and plied the rakes of the haymakers. The meadows became lists, their sudden employment a joust-at-arms, and some slender youth crowned the swiftest workwoman with field flowers withering in the nearest swathe. All wove garlands, then made for the shade fo the trees and shared a low basket of golden apples. One had a lute and another sang a love ditty with ethereal passion. They were in Arcadia—silken shepherdesses, slim princes in disguise—and they breathed the sweetness, the innocent yet lofty grace which was the country's natal air.

"Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother," kept much, in her gentle, filial sorrow, to her great chamber above the gardens, where she wrote and studied, and to her closet where before an eastern window was set the low chair beside which she kneeled in prayer for her living and her dead. She prayed much alone, but once a day, when the morn was young, she sent for one who was named her gentlewoman indeed, but to whom all her train gave deference, knowing of the love between this lady and their mistress. The

lady came, beautiful, patient, with lips that smiled on life, and wonderful dark eyes in which the smile was drowned. The Countess took her morning kiss and the fair coolness of her pressed cheek, then praised the flowers in her hands, all jewelled with the dew—a lovely posy to be set amongst the Countess's little library of pious works. Then on this, as on other days, the two fair women read together, their soft voices making tremulous music of the stately Latin. The reading done, they kneeled side by side, dark hair against light, praying silently, each her own prayer. It was a morning rite, poignantly dear to them both; it began and helped upon its way the live-long lingering day. They arose, and kissed, and presently the Countess spoke of letters which she must write. "Then," said the other, "I will go sit by the fountain until you wish for me."

"The fountain!" answered Mary Sidney. "Ah, Damaris! I would that thou mightst forget the fountain. I would that other blooms than red roses were planted there!"

"That would not I!" the other answered. "I love the fountain. And once a red rose meant to me—Paradise!"

"Then go thy ways and gather thy roses," said the Countess fondly. "I would give thee heaven an I could—so that thou stayed upon earth with thy fairing!"

The Countess sate herself down to write to Philip Sidney, not knowing that he was so near the frontier whence no living messenger, no warm and loving cry could ever draw him back. Damaris, a book in her hand, passed through the silent darkened house out to the sunlit lawns. Her skirt swept the enamelled turf; she touched the tallest flowers as she passed, and they bloomed no worse for that light caress. Poetry was in her every motion, and she was too beautiful a thing to be so sad. She made no parade of grief. Faint smiles came and went, and all things added to her birthright of grace. She was the Countess's almoner: every day she did good, lessening pain, whispering balm to the anguish-stricken, speaking as with authority to troubled souls. Back from the hovel to stately houses she went, and lo! the maid of honour, exquisite, perfect as a flower, men wooed, but might not win her. They came and went, but to her it was no matter. In her eyes still burned the patient splendour with which she waited

for the tide to take her, bearing her out beyond the shallows to one who also tarried.

With a gentle sound the fountain rose and fell in a grey stone basin. Around it were set the rose trees and beyond the roses tall box and yew most fantastically clipped screened from observation the fairy spot. Damaris, slowly entering, became at once the spirit of the place. She paced the fountain's grassy rim to a rustic seat and took it for her chair of state from which for a while, with her white hands behind her head, she watched the silver spray and the blue midsummer sky. A lark sang, but so high in the blue that its joyous note jarred not the languor of the place. Damaris opened her book—but what need of written poesy? The red roses smelled so sweet that 'twas as though she lay against the heart of one royal bloom. She left her throne and trod the circle, and in both hands she took the heavy blossoms and pressed them to her lips. The odour was like warm wine. "Now and for all my life," said Damaris, "for me one faded rose! Afterwards, two in a garden like this—like this!"

The grass was so green and warm that presently she lay down upon it, her head

pillowed upon her arm, her eyes gazing through the fountain mist and down the emerald slopes to where ran the elmwood avenue. She gazed in idleness, through half-shut eyelids, wrapped in lullabies and drowsy warmth. Hoof-beats between the elms troubled her not. When through the mist of falling water and the veil of drooping leaves she saw riding towards the house a youth clad in blue, the horse and rider seemed but figures in a piece of tapestry. Her satin eyelids closed, and if other riders presently showed in the tapestry she saw them not, for she was sound asleep. She dreamed of a masque at Hampton Court, long ago, and of the gown she had worn and how merry she had been, and she dreamed of the Queen. Then her dream changed and she sate with Henry Sedley on the sands of a lost sea-coast, stretching in pale levels beyond the ken of man. The surf raced towards them like shadowy white horses, and a red moon hung low in the sky. There was music in the air and his voice was speaking, but suddenly the sea and its champing horses and the red moon passed away. She stirred and now it was not her brother's voice that spoke. Green grass was beneath

her, splendid roses, red and gold, were censers slowly swinging, the silver fountain leaped as if to meet the skylark's song. Slowly Damaris raised herself from her grassy bed and looked with widening eyes upon an intruder. "I—I went to sleep," she said. "Is't heaven, or will this rose also fade?" She closed her eyes for a moment; then, opening them, "O my dream!" she cried, "go not away!"

The sunlight fell upon his lifted head. and on his dress, that was as rich as any bridegroom's, and on a sword-knot of silver gauze. "Look you thus in heaven, O my king?" she breathed.

Sir Mortimer approached her very slowly; for he saw that her senses strayed. As he came nearer she shrank against the wall of bloom. "Dear heart," he said, "I am a living man, and before all the world I now may wear thy silver sleeve. But the rose you gave me once before hath withered into dust. I could not hold it back. Break for me another rose—*Dione!*"

She put out her hand and obeyed. Into her eyes had come a crescent splendour, upon her lips the dawn of an ineffable smile, but yet troubled, yet without full under-

standing she, trembling, held out the flower at arm's length. But when Ferne's hand closed upon hers, when she felt herself drawn into his arms and his kiss upon her lips, his whisper in her ears, she awoke, and thought not less of heaven, but only that heaven had come to earth.

THE END.

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